Course Description

This seminar is dedicated to the exploration of the ideals that guide our pursuit of knowledge and understanding. One focus will be on Bildung, a concept that has played a key role in German thought from the 18th century to today, and has become the cornerstone of German academia as well as the central preoccupation of an influential literary genre, the Bildungsroman.

The term Bildung has no equivalent in English, but possible translations are “education,” “formation,” “self-cultivation” or “culture.” It describes not only a process of education, but also its result: a state of maturity and cultural refinement that is supposed to reconcile the needs of the individual with the demands of the world. Bildung seeks, claimed Wilhelm von Humboldt, “the true end of Man,” “the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole.” As a concept of ideal education and self-cultivation fuelled by the principles of European Enlightenment, Bildung encompasses understanding, knowledge, reflection, aesthetic consciousness and competence in social judgment and political action; it addresses issues of liberation and emancipation in both individual and social perspective. The concept of Bildung has a wide variety of connotations and dimensions, not only pedagogical, but philosophical, psychological, political and cultural.

The aim of the class is to build up a critical understanding of the ideals and implications of Bildung by studying some of the classic authors who helped articulate and establish it (Humboldt, Fichte, Schiller) and by discussing examples of the Bildungsroman from its beginning (Goethe’s Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship, 1795) to later variations (Musil’s The
*Confusions of Young Törless*, 1906, and Hesse’s *Demian*, 1919). The novels describe and analyse the possibilities and problems of education and formation and the clash between the individual and society, between formal education and living experience.

We will also take a look at the development of the concept of Bildung in the 20th century, the transformation of its ideals (in response to the crucial cultural changes of modernity) and the problems arising from the apparent disappearance of a classical canon of Bildung.

A series of films supplement the discourse on education and self-cultivation and broaden our perspective and approach.

**Requirements**

**Attendance** is mandatory for all seminars and film screenings. Reading assignments have to be done in advance of class for it is on those readings that all in-class writing assignments and seminar discussions are based.

Absences are registered in all classes, and lateness is registered as absence. More than two absences in the semester will significantly affect the grade for the course!

**Presentation in class:** For each seminar one or two students will prepare a presentation to introduce the assigned readings and to facilitate the discussions.

**Writing Assignments:** Short in-class writing assignments; mid-semester essay of 1500-2000 words (deadline: end of week 7, Sunday, October 19, 2014, 18.00); final essay of 3500-4000 words (deadline: end of completion week, Friday, December 19, 2014, 13.00)

**Policy on Late Submission of Papers:** All written work must be submitted electronically and on time. Essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.
Grade Breakdown:

Seminar Grade (i.e. Participation & Presentation): 33.4%
Mid-semester Essay: 33.3%
Final Essay: 33.3%

Schedule

Week 1:

Tuesday, September 2: Introduction: Bildung, Education, Formation
Thursday, September 4: Introduction: Bildung, Education, Formation

Week 2:

Tuesday, September 9: Film discussion
Friday, September 12: Moses Mendelssohn & Immanuel Kant: *What Is Enlightenment?* (1784)

Week 3:

Tuesday, September 16: Wilhelm von Humboldt: *The Limits of State Action* [Ideen zu einem Versuch, die Grenzen der Wirksamkeit des Staats zu bestimmen, 1792/1851]
Thursday, September 18: Wilhelm von Humboldt: *The Limits of State Action*
Friday, September 19: Film: *Kynodontas / Dogtooth* (2009, Yorgos Lanthimos)

Week 4:

Tuesday, September 23: Film discussion / Essay questions
Thursday, September 25: Johann Gottlieb Fichte: *The Vocation of the Scholar* [Einige Vorlesungen über die Bestimmung des Gelehrten, 1794]
**Friday, September 26:** Johann Gottlieb Fichte: *The Vocation of the Scholar*

*Week 5:*

**Tuesday, September 30:** Friedrich Schiller: *On the Aesthetic Education of Man. In a Series of Letters [Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, in einer Reihe von Briefen, 1793/1795]*

**Thursday, October 2:** Friedrich Schiller: *On the Aesthetic Education of Man. In a Series of Letters*

**Friday, October 3:** Holiday

*Week 6:*

**Tuesday, October 7:** Friedrich Nietzsche: *Schopenhauer as Educator [Schopenhauer als Erzieher, 1874]*

**Thursday, October 9:** Friedrich Nietzsche: *Schopenhauer as Educator*

**Friday, October 10:** Film: *Dead Poet’s Society* (1989, Peter Weir)

*Week 7:*

**Tuesday, October 14:** Film discussion

**Thursday, October 16:** Ernst Jünger: *On Pain [Über den Schmerz, 1934]*

**Friday, October 17:** No Class!
* Mid-semester essay due Sunday, October 19, 2014, 18.00!

**Fall Break:** Monday, October 20 – Friday, October 24, 2014

*Week 8:*

**Tuesday, October 28:** Bildungsroman / Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship. [Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, 1795/1796]*

**Thursday, October 30:** Goethe: *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*

**Friday, October 31:** Goethe: *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship / Novalis: Henry von Ofterdingen.* [Heinrich von Ofterdingen, 1802]
Week 9:

Tuesday, November 4: Robert Musil: *The Confusions of Young Törless*  [*Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß*, 1906]

Thursday, November 6: Robert Musil: *The Confusions of Young Törless*

Friday, November 7: Film: *If* ... (1968, Lindsay Anderson)

Week 10:

Tuesday, November 11: Film discussion


Friday, November 14: Hermann Hesse: *Demian*

Week 11:

Tuesday, November 18: Charles P. Snow: *The Two Cultures*  (1959/1963)

Thursday, November 20: Charles P. Snow: *The Two Cultures*.

Friday, November 21: Museum Visit

Week 12:

Tuesday, November 25: Final essay workshop

Thursday, November 27: Essay draft peer review

Friday, November 28: Guest lecture (tba)

Week 13:

Tuesday, December 2: Character and Personality Development through Bildung


Thursday, December 4: Character and Personality Development through Bildung

**Friday, December 5:** Film: *An Education* (2009, Lone Scherfig)

**Week 14:**

**Tuesday, December 9:** Peter Sloterdijk: *Critique of Cynical Reason* [Kritik der zynischen Vernunft, 1983]

**Thursday, December 11:** Peter Sloterdijk: *Critique of Cynical Reason.*

**Friday, December 12:** Final discussion

**Week 15: Completion Week** (Monday, December 15 – Friday, December 19, 2014)

Final essays due Friday, December 19, 2014, 13.00