This course is designed to introduce students to the history of East German society and culture from the foundation of the German Democratic Republic through the velvet revolution of 1989 and the demise of the regime. While the course will focus predominantly on the period 1949-1989, a brief exploration of postwar conditions and the Soviet Occupation, 1945-1949, will provide the students with sufficient historical background to better evaluate the main period under investigation.

From its first meeting onward, this course will identify leading theories and questions useful for analyzing this historic era. Scholars on both sides of the Atlantic have struggled to understand East German power dynamics, the regime’s ability to retain power over the course of four decades despite popular dissatisfaction with numerous aspects of East German society and culture. Should we categorize the GDR as a totalitarian state with strong similarities to the Nazi regime in terms of the regime’s attempts to control the social and cultural sphere, or should we define East Germany as an idealistic, albeit flawed, experiment to construct a socialist society? Can the GDR best be described as a “modern dictatorship” ala Jürgen Kocka, or as a “welfare dictatorship,” a term preferred by Jarausch and Klessman. What difficulties did politicians and administrators first encounter as they attempted to form an antifascist cultural climate and a classless society? Under the communist system, are traditional notions of elite and popular culture appropriate? How rigid was the separation between the government-controlled schools, organizational life and cultural venues on the one hand and the private sphere, which many scholars argue allowed for a unique “niche-society?” To what extent did the state realize its changing plans for the development of East German culture and society? Which cultural and social campaigns met with the most support from the populace? Which policies or indeed lack of action or initiative engendered the strongest levels of dissatisfaction? To what degree did cultural and social actors on different levels find the necessary space to critique and comment on the state and its policies within the communist system?

Finally, at the end of the course, we will question whether one can best define the social and cultural changes that accompanied the Wende as a sort of “reunification” or more accurately as an “Anschluss” -- the takeover of E. German social and cultural spheres by West Germans and their value systems. To what extent did social and cultural trends and traditions that evolved under the East German regime have an enduring impact on the new federal states in the first few years after reunification? How can we understand the importance many Ossis (former GDR citizens) place in the relics of East German consumer society – in its Trabis, rock music, Kampflieder (fighting songs) and kitchen utensils? How did specific societal groups such as adolescents and women fare in the chaos of these defining years?

Requirements:

Participation (15%), midterm (25%), paper (25%) and a final exam (35%).
Class Policies:

**Communication:** If a serious matter keeps you from attending class, keep me informed about your situation and progress. Communicating with me via email is generally the best. Keep in mind that I may not check my email on the weekend, however. I can also be reached at reasonable hours at the following number should a crisis occur: (608) 628-4109. It is not a good idea to call me the day before a paper is due for an extension.

**Participation:** This class will provide you with a forum to express your views on the course reading and lecture material. So keep up with the reading, come prepared and speak up! Asking questions and making comments are equally important to the quality of our discussion. Remember that any question you have is an important question. Any relevant comment you want to make is an important comment. Similar to your overall grade, when I determine your grade for participation, I will take into consideration improvement over the course of the semester. If you are a shy person by nature, take advantage of this course as an opportunity to speak up with confidence. The best discussions are normally those in which a variety of different people take part.

Finally, students are consumers and should have some input in the education they receive. I will try to accommodate your suggestions, diverse learning styles and interests.

**Texts:**


A course reader will be available for purchase at the Humanities copy shop.

A copy of all readings, including the course reader, will be available on reserve at the Helen C. White Library.

**Course Outline:**

**Week 1:**

**January 21:** Course Overview

**January 23:** Postwar Reconstruction of Culture and Society in the Soviet Occupation Zone
January 26: Culture and Society in the Soviet Occupation Zone Continued

January 28: The Foundation of East Germany

January 30: Foundations & Applications of Socialist Policy I

Week 3:

February 2: Foundations & Applications of Socialist Policy II
Read: Chapters 1-3 in *Dictatorship as Experience*, 17-72.

February 4: Stalinism
Read: Chapters 5-6 and 14 in *Dictatorship as Experience* 91-121 and 265-284.

February 6: Socialist Realism & the Arts in the Early Years of the Regime

Week 4:

February 9: East German Work Culture
Read: Chapters 15 and 16 in *Dictatorship as Experience*, 285-324.

February 11: Education- Creating the Socialist School

February 13: Youth Organization Life and Youth Cultures

Week 5:

February 16: The Berlin Wall, Social and Cultural Repercussions of the E/W Divide

February 18: *Wirtschaftswunder* in the East? Consumer Culture in the 60s and 70s
Read: André Steiner, “Dissolution of the ‘Dictatorship over Needs’? Consumer Behavior and Economic Reform in East Germany in the 1960s” in Susan Strasser, Charles McGovern and

**February 20: Consumer Culture Continued**  

**Week 6:**

**February 23: Developments in Mass Media**  
Read: Chapters 12 and 13 in *Dictatorship as Experience*, 213-264.

**February 25: Mid-semester Review**

**February 27: In-class Midterm Exam**

**Week 7:**

**March 1: Socialist Policy vs. Daily Reality: the Experiences of Women in the GDR**  

**March 3: Women in the GDR Continued**  

**March 5: Sport Culture: From the Local to the National and International Arena**  

**Week 8:**

**March 8: From Ulbricht to Honecker: Social and Cultural Policy**  

**March 10: Finding a Voice: Writers and Artists in the 70s and 80s**

**March 12: Finding a Voice Continued**  
Read: Christa Wolf, *Quest for Christa T*, 3-84.

**Week 9 Spring Break**

**Week 10:**
March 22: Discussion of Wolf’s Quest for Christa T.
Finish reading: Quest for Christa T, 85-185.

March 24: Policemen, Stasi and their Spitzel: Citizen Surveillance

March 26: Citizen Surveillance Continued
Read: Chapter 7 in Dictatorship as Experience, 126-141.

Week 11:

March 29: The GDR: A Militarized Society?

March 31: The Built Environment: Socialist Architecture and Housing

April 2: Memory Culture: Interpreting the Past through a Socialist Lens

Week 12:

April 5: Travel and Tourism

April 7: Consumer Culture in the 1980s
Paper Assignment due

April 9: Good Friday – No class

Week 13:

April 12: Foreigners and Homosexuals in the Land of Volkerfreundschaft

April 14: Religious Minorities in East Germany

April 16: Religious Movements and other Protest Groups

Week 14:

April 19: The Social and Cultural Wende & its Immediate Aftermath Part I
Read: Documents 1-5, pages 30-41, Jarausch and Gransow book of documents.

April 21: The Social and Cultural Wende & its Aftermath Part II

April 23: Berdahl and Borderlands

Week 15:

April 26: Reactions to the Wende
Read: Berdahl, 72-183.

April 28: Neonazis in the GDR and the New Bundesländer

April 30: Youth in the new Bundesländer

Week 16:

May 3: Society and Culture in the new Bundesländer
Read: The remainder of Berdahl, 184-233.

May 5: Ostalgie? (Nostalgie for the former GDR)

May 7: Review

Sunday May 9: Final Exam 12:25; Place TBA