

# HSTR 363

## Eastern Europe

### Life and Death on the Eastern Front, 1939-1945

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The Second World War was unlike any war before or since, and nowhere was its destructive energy felt more forcefully than in Eastern Europe under Nazi and Soviet occupation. Of the seventy million lives that the war claimed worldwide, nearly half were lost in Eastern Europe. In the Soviet Union alone, the war killed more than twenty-six million men, women, and children – more than a third of them civilians. Proportionally, Poland lost more of its population than any other country in the war, with 6.5 million dead out of a prewar population of some 35 million. Staggeringly, a full 90% of Poland's prewar Jewish population was dead by 1945.

This online course will make use of primary sources, wartime documents, scholarly works, memoirs and diaries, visual arts, literature, and film to examine the impact of war and occupation on the lives of ordinary men and women on the eastern front. We will discuss a few battles, but most of our attention will be on the mechanics and rhythms of life and survival, resistance and collaboration, commemoration and loss. Our primary geographical focus will be on the present-day states of Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, and we will consider the experiences, outlooks, and motivations of both victims and perpetrators alike.

This course aims at two specific learning objectives. First, HSTR 363 will provide you with an overview of an aspect of the Second World War that is little known and poorly understood by most Americans. At the conclusion of the course, you should have a fuller grasp of the central issues and challenges that Eastern European men and women faced in the midst of a tumultuous century.

The second goal is to provide you with an opportunity to actively engage in historical inquiry through evaluating primary evidence and material. You will learn to interpret Eastern European history like professional historians, using sources such as memoirs, scholarly works, literature, film, and journalistic reportage. Throughout the semester, you will have the opportunity to analyze these varied sources through written assignments and online discussion forums in order to formulate your own interpretations of historical trends and events.

#### **Learning Objectives**

Students will (1) gain an understanding of the course of Eastern European history during the Second World War; (2) develop a familiarity with the principal historiographical debates in the field; (3) further hone their ability to read, write, and think critically, analytically, and historically by working with a wide range of primary and secondary sources.

#### **Required Texts**

In addition to various online readings and PDF files that I will post, there are *three* required texts for this course. I have ordered copies of these books at the UM Bookstore; you are welcome to obtain copies via Amazon or another online retailer, as well.

- *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak: Five Notebooks from the Lodz Ghetto*, ed. Alan Adelson, trans. Kamil Turowski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)
- Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998)
- Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (New York: Penguin, 2002)

Readings, supplemental materials, and discussion questions for each of the weeks can be found on the course site.

### **Accessibility and Accommodations**

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction by supporting collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students. If you have a disability that requires an accommodation, contact your instructor during the first week of the semester so that proper accommodations can be provided. Please contact [Disability Services for Students](#) if you have questions, or call Disability Services for Students (DSS) for voice/text 406.243.2243. You may also fax the Lommasson Center 154 for more information 406.243.5330.

### **Academic Honesty**

Students enrolled in online courses are expected to abide by the same standards of academic honesty as those in on-campus courses. Please acquaint yourself with the [UM Student Conduct Code](#). Cases of plagiarism or other breaches of academic honesty will result in a zero for the assignment and a possible failing grade for the course.

### **Weekly Topics**

Week 1: Introduction to the Course

Week 2: Clash of Ideologies: The *Ostkrieg* as a War of Annihilation

Week 3: From Barbarossa to Berlin: Overview of the Campaign in the East

Week 4: Behind the Lines: Life and Death in Occupied Poland

Week 5: Under Siege: The Blockade of Leningrad

Week 6: Patriotic Rage: Soviet Wartime Propaganda

Week 7: The Road to Wannsee: Inventing Mass Extermination

Week 8: The Final Solution: Implementing Mass Extermination

Week 9: Ordinary Men or Willing Executioners?

Week 10: Jedwabne as a Site of Memory (and Forgetting)

Week 11: The Politics of Commemoration Rituals and Monuments

Week 12: Summing Up and Reflecting on Course Themes

### **Assignment and Grading Scale**

Discussion: 60%

Final Exam: 40%

A 94-100

A- 90-93

B+ 87-89

B 84-86

B- 80-83

C+ 77-79

C 74-76

C- 70-73

D+ 67-69  
D 64-66  
D- 60-63  
F 59 and below

### Discussion Grading Rubric

Discussion participation is required during each week of this course. In an online course, these threaded discussions are the “classroom” where conversations occur and where we have the opportunity to learn from each other. They are essential to this course. Discussions require focused, consistent participation each week. Make sure to read your fellow students’ postings and think about what you want to add to the ongoing conversation.

Threaded discussions are simply asynchronous (not occurring at the same time) online conversations that are organized into topics, or threads, so that you can visually see who responded to what comment and in what sequence. In an asynchronous environment such as an online course, this type of structure is helpful.

Please follow these guidelines for discussion posts:

1. **Use academic writing style** (proper capitalization, punctuation, spelling and grammar) in all messages to avoid misunderstandings.
  - a. Do not use emoticons, e-mail acronyms such as lol (laughing out loud), imho (in my humble opinion), tl;dr (too long; didn’t read), and other informal, abbreviated forms of electronic writing. **Students in any of your online courses may be using screen readers or other assistive devices that will not properly read such abbreviations.** Be courteous and write in ways that are accessible and understandable to all members of your online class.
2. Submit your first discussion post early in the week so that others have time to read and respond. Check the discussion board daily so you remain engaged in the conversation. (Moodle will **not** notify you of new posts.)
3. Be sensitive to the perspective of others when expressing ideas. Do not use an authoritarian or judgmental style of writing that discourages open discussion.
4. Stick to the topic and contribute with comments/questions that move the dialogue forward or into deeper reflection.
5. Be concise.
6. Base comments on the assigned readings and make sure to refer to them as needed.
7. Engage others in the discussion. Respond to comments and encourage responses. Student-to-student interaction is essential.

The discussion forums are worth 20 points a week. Your weekly discussion score will be assessed according to the following scale:

18-20 = Student’s posts are submitted on time and express critical thinking about the assigned and/or recommended readings for the week with direct references to readings (when quoting the text, include a page number for our reference). Responses to other students’ posts are thoughtful and further the discussion (i.e., they make a contribution beyond a mere “good point!” or “me too”). All posts are well-written and contain no grammatical or spelling mistakes.

14-17 = Student’s posts are submitted on time and express critical thinking about the assigned

and/or recommended readings for the week, but with minimal or indirect references to the readings. Responses to other students' posts are thoughtful and further the discussion. All posts are well-written and contain only a few grammatical or spelling mistakes.

12-16 = Student's posts express some critical thinking about topics from the week, but do not engage actively with the assigned readings. Responses to other students' posts are perfunctory and do not advance the discussion in a meaningful way. The posts may contain grammatical mistakes and/or incomplete sentences.

8-11 = Student's posts make little reference to the week's readings. Responses to other students' posts are lacking or absent. The posts contain grammatical mistakes and/or incomplete sentences that betray a chronic lack of care and preparation.

0-7 = Student did not post a response or posted the reflection after the deadline.

*(A final note on participation: We are working through a large body of reading and covering topics which may be new to most of you. I don't expect that everything you post be of publishable quality. I do expect, however, that your posts reflect thoughtful and sincere engagement with the topics and issues raised in our weekly readings, lectures, and supplementary materials).*

## Final Paper

Choose and answer **one** of the following questions. Successful papers will be based around a thesis statement and supported by ample textual evidence. **Your paper should be 5-7 pages in length and double-spaced, with standard margins and 12-point Times New Roman font. For citations, you may use either the Chicago Manual of Style (footnotes) or parenthetical style (author last name, page number), but not both.**

1. Consider Kochina's diary of the Leningrad Blockade and Sierakowiak's diary of everyday life in the Lodz Ghetto. Analyze the methods of survival devised and deployed by the authors. What habits did they cultivate and how did these strategies of survival entail an alteration of the authors' pre-war codes of morals and values?
2. Daniel Jonah Goldhagen famously characterized the German perpetrators of the Holocaust as "willing executioners" and took issue with Christopher Browning's characterization of Reserve Police Battalion 101 as "ordinary men." Based on the course readings, make a case for the validity of one scholar's argument over the other (or offer an alternate interpretive argument of your own).
3. Consider Gross's account of the massacre at Jedwabne and the essays in *The Neighbors Respond* and *My Brother's Keeper*. Why has Gross's book generated such controversy among supporters and detractors in his native Poland?

## Final Paper Grading Rubric

### The Superior Paper (A range)

- **Thesis:** Easily identifiable, plausible, novel, sophisticated, insightful, crystal clear.
- **Structure:** Evident, understandable, appropriate for formal college-level writing. Excellent transitions from point to point. Paragraphs support solid topic sentences and flow logically.
- **Use of evidence:** Textual evidence used to buttress every point with at least one example. Excellent integration of quoted material into sentences (i.e., not simply bleeding chunks of text

dropped onto the page, but evidence that is seamlessly integrated into the paper).

- **Analysis:** Author clearly relates evidence to thesis/argument; analysis is fresh and exciting, posing new ways to think of the material.
- **Logic and argumentation:** All ideas in the paper flow logically; the argument is identifiable, reasonable, and sound. Author anticipates and successfully defuses counter-arguments; makes insightful connections that illuminate thesis.
- **Mechanics:** Sentence structure, grammar, and diction excellent; correct use of punctuation and citation style; minimal to no spelling errors; absolutely no run-on sentences or comma splices.

### The Good Paper (B range)

- **Thesis:** Promising, but may be slightly unclear, descriptive as opposed to analytical (i.e., restates the assignment question), or lacking in insight or originality.
- **Structure:** Generally clear and appropriate, though may wander occasionally. May have a few unclear transitions, or a few paragraphs without strong topic sentences.
- **Use of evidence:** Examples used to support most points. Some evidence does not support point, or may appear where inappropriate. Quotes well integrated into sentences.
- **Analysis:** Evidence often related to argument/thesis, though links perhaps not always clear.
- **Logic and argumentation:** Argument of paper is clear, usually flows logically and makes sense. Some evidence that counter-arguments acknowledged, though perhaps not addressed. Occasional insightful connections to outside material made.
- **Mechanics:** Sentence structure, grammar, and diction strong; punctuation and citation style used correctly. Some (very minor) mechanical errors.

### The Borderline Paper (C range)

- **Thesis:** May be unclear (contains many vague terms), appear unoriginal, or offer relatively little that is new; provides little around which to structure the paper.
- **Structure:** Generally unclear, often wanders or jumps around. Few or weak transitions, many paragraphs without topic sentences.
- **Use of evidence:** Examples used to support some points. Points often lack supporting evidence, or evidence used where inappropriate (often because there may be no clear point). Quotes may be poorly integrated into sentences.
- **Analysis:** Quotes appear often without analysis relating them to argument; or analysis offers nothing beyond the quote without any commentary.
- **Logic and argumentation:** Logic may often fail, or argument may often be unclear. May not address counter-arguments or make any outside connections.
- **Mechanics:** Problems in sentence structure, grammar, and diction, but not major ones. Errors in punctuation, citation style, and spelling. May have multiple run-on sentences or comma splices.

### The Deficient Paper (D range)

- **Thesis:** Difficult to identify at all, may be bland restatement of obvious point.
- **Structure:** Unclear, often because thesis is weak or non-existent. Paragraph transitions confusing and unclear. Few topic sentences.
- **Use of evidence:** Very few or very weak examples. General failure to support statements, or evidence seems to support no statement. Quotes not integrated into sentences; "plopped in" in improper manner.
- **Analysis:** Very little or very weak attempt to relate evidence to argument; argument may be unidentifiable and/or unsupported by evidence
- **Logic and argumentation:** Ideas do not flow at all, usually because there is no argument to support. Simplistic view of topic; no effort to grasp possible alternative views.

- **Mechanics:** Big problems in sentence structure, grammar, and diction. Frequent major errors in citation style, punctuation, and spelling. May have many run-on sentences and comma splices.

**The Failing Paper (F)**

- Shows obviously minimal lack of effort or comprehension of the assignment. Very difficult to understand, owing to major problems with mechanics, structure, and analysis. Has no identifiable thesis or an incoherent one.