



KIIS Austria Program, Summer 2027

PSY 299-1 Topics: The Psychology of Good and Evil

Professor: Dr. Alison Heck

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Instructor's office hours: on site and by appointment

Syllabus subject to change

Course Description

The Holocaust was one of the great tragedies of the modern era. One question that is still asked today is: "How could people commit such atrocities?" This class seeks to answer that very question and explore how normal people can do terrible things. We will talk about the effect of authority and the forces that drive us to obey, the urge to conform, the power of out-groups, and the dehumanization of the other. We will also examine factors and core themes of human goodness. For example, what factors influence those few who risked their lives to protect their neighbors, or complete strangers, from the Nazi regime. By the end of this class, we will have a better understanding of the psychology that drove this period in history, compare it to atrocities and acts of heroism that have happened since then, and hopefully, be in a better position to understand and prevent similar horrors in the future.

Course Level Note: Western Kentucky University lists Special Topics courses in Psychology as 299. Despite this course's 299 listing at WKU, it is actually an upper level (300-400+ level) course at many other universities. As such, it is being taught as an upper-level 300-400+ level course.

Major Topics Covered in the Course

Historical studies on social psychology, particularly related to obedience to authority figures, conformity, and related issues; group influences on individual behavior; the bystander effect; prejudice and discrimination; empathy; prosocial behavior, such as altruism; mindfulness; gratitude; forgiveness; application to real-world events, both historical and current, including the Holocaust. A schedule will be provided once excursion and class dates are finalized.

Course Objectives/Student Learning Outcomes:

Students will...

- **Demonstrate an understanding of different psychological perspectives** related to issues of good and evil and their relationship to areas of human concern. How assessed: reading engagement, class discussion, in-class reflections.
- **Verbally articulate complex information** in an interesting presentation on a chosen current topic related to good and evil. How assessed: good and evil presentation.
- **Develop their own views on a variety of questions** related to good and evil. How

assessed: reading engagement, class discussion.

- **Understand the effect of situational variables on individual behavior.** How assessed: book review, class discussion.
- **Describe the psychological aspects of basic social problems** such as prejudice, discrimination, and aggression as well as potential solutions to these problems. How assessed: reading engagement, class discussion, book review
- **Describe the psychological aspects of basic social virtues**, such as forgiveness, empathy, altruism, happiness, gratitude, mindfulness, compassion. How assessed: in-class reflections.
- **Describe the historical and social factors that led to the Holocaust and examine parallels to other incidents of genocide.** How assessed: in-class reflections, place-as-text activities.

Overall KIIS Program Student Learning Outcomes:

KIIS Study Abroad Mission Statement:

KIIS provides high-quality education abroad programs for students from all diverse backgrounds that promote deep international learning, are integrated into the curriculum, and encourage critical and creative thinking. Our goal is to help students understand the wider world and develop personal and professional skills for lifelong enrichment. We strive to go beyond generalizations and cultural stereotypes to help foster a nuanced appreciation of the world in which we live.

Students participating on KIIS study abroad programs aim to:

- 1) Understand contemporary issues of their host country/countries (i.e. KIIS program location).
- 2) Develop skills to interact comfortably in a global setting.
- 3) Understand other cultures.

Prior to your KIIS study abroad program, and again at the conclusion of your program, KIIS will ask each student to a) answer a few multiple-choice questions, and b) write a short reflective essay (two paragraphs in length) related to the elements detailed above. There is no right or wrong answer, and your responses will not affect your grade in any way. The purpose of the exercise is to help KIIS measure the effectiveness of its study abroad programs.

Required Text(s)

Wiesel, E., & Wiesel, M. (2006) *Night*. New York: Hill and Wang

Frankl, V.E. (2006). *Man's search for meaning*. Beacon Press.

Frankl, V.E. (2020). *Yes to life: In spite of everything*. Beacon Press.

Additional required readings will be available to students online (Google Classroom/Perusall, websites). Readings will be provided prior to the beginning of the course. Students will need to have the readings available (either as hard copies or digital copies on a laptop or tablet) when

we cover them during the program. Readings will include academic sources, including those directly related to Austria and the surrounding region, and other reputable non-academic sources.

Instructional Activities

There will be several categories of instructional activities during your time in Bregenz for this class. Each assignment will be detailed more fully below, but a bulleted list is provided below

- Attendance at all full-group excursions, but the following two will be particularly relevant to this class:
 - Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial. Place-as-text activity.
 - Jewish Museum in Hohenems. Place-as-text activity.
- Class Exercises and Discussions on Readings
- Field Observations & Artifact/Site Analyses
- Book Review of *Night* and/or the Frankl books
- Class/Evening Film (e.g., *Schindler's List*, *KZ*)
- Pre-/Post-Quiz
- Good & Evil Presentation

Attendance and Class Participation

KIIS program participants are expected to be punctual to and in attendance at all classes, presentations, meetings and required excursions, and to remain with the program for the full academic period. Unexcused absences from classes and/or mandatory meetings will result in a lowering of the student's final grade, as will excessive tardiness. Multiple unexcused absences could result in expulsion from the program. Any absence from an academic class session must be excused for medical reasons.

In addition to being required to attend all classes and excursions, you will be required to actively participate in the classroom discussions and activities each day. This may include small- or large-group discussions, daily reflections submitted at the end of the class period, and/or other types of activities during the class period or excursion.

Readings and Films

During the program, you will be assigned required readings that relate back to the topics we will be discussing during our time in Austria. All readings will be provided before our journey so that they can be downloaded ahead of time. Reflections/discussions will occur during class sessions, but you are required to share your thoughts on each of the readings before class. Prompts will be provided, and these posts will be submitted via the relevant platform (e.g., Google Classroom or Perusall).

Tentatively, we (either our class or with the full group) will watch a movie or documentary that relates directly to this course. For example, we may watch the documentary *KZ*, which is about the Mauthausen (Austria) concentration camp, or a film like *Schindler's List*.

Book Review

In addition to the provided readings described above, you will be required to read, review, and reflect on the book *Night* by Elie Wiesel and/or the related books by Victor Frankl who was also a prisoner in a concentration camp during the Holocaust. *Night* outlines Elie Wiesel's experience as a prisoner in a concentration camp during the Holocaust, whereas the two Frankl books

primarily focus on resilience and finding personal meaning and purpose in the face of evil. You will be asked to read the book before we visit Dachau, near Munich, Germany, and then reflect on not only what you felt and learned from the book but also directly during your time at the Dachau memorial.

Field Observations & Artifact/Site Analyses

In addition to the time spent “in class,” we will also be visiting different sites around Bregenz and the surrounding region. These will be rich opportunities for us to actively observe phenomena in Austria related to good and evil (e.g., people who fought back vs. people who were complicit during the Holocaust).

Pre- and Post-Quiz

This is an assessment that will be given during our first and last class days – you will be asked questions on the psychology of good and evil that will be relevant to what we will be covering during the program. This will assess whether the key learning outcomes have been achieved by the end of our time in Austria.

Good and Evil Presentation

During the final class period(s), as a culminating reflection on our month-long study abroad experience in Bregenz, Austria, each of you will deliver a brief individual presentation highlighting your most meaningful takeaways from the course. Presentations should connect personal experiences, course concepts, and observations from our travels, exploring how the study of morality, human behavior, prejudice, altruism, bystander intervention, obedience, or related themes shaped your understanding of good and evil in everyday life. You will want to incorporate visual media—such as photographs, short video clips, artwork, monuments, or historical sites encountered during the program—to illustrate key ideas and enrich your reflections. Given the anticipated class size, presentations should be concise (approximately 5–10 minutes) and focus on one or two central insights rather than attempting to summarize the entire course experience.

Grading

Course grades will be based on the total number of points earned on each of the activities. Letter grades for the course will be assigned as follows:

90-100% of the total points available = A

80-89% of the total points available = B

70-79% of the total points available = C

60-69% of the total points available = D

0-59% of the total points available = F

Source of Points	Percentage of Total Grade
Attendance and Class Participation	20%
Readings & Reflections	20%
Field Observations & Artifact/Site Analyses	10%
Book Review	20%
Pre-/Post-Quiz	10%
Presentation	20%

Late Work/Make-up Work: Late work or make up work will be given at the discretion of the instructor. The validity of an excuse given as a reason for missing an exam or assignment will be determined by the instructor with consultation from the program director if needed. The instructor reserves the right to not allow late work or make-up work, or to give late or make-up work which is more difficult, less convenient, or in a different form than the original.

Class Preparation

- The reading for the day (can be electronic version or paper).
- Laptop, tablet, phone, camera, or any device that can access the web and take pictures.
- Something to write with and on.

Academic Integrity: Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. This includes plagiarism (copying, paraphrasing, or otherwise stealing another's words, ideas, or idea process without proper citation) and cheating of any kind that attempts to pass off another's work as your own. Consequences for academic dishonesty may result in a failing grade for the assignment in question or the course.

Generative AI Policy: Use of AI is permitted/encouraged in some ways, with proper attribution, but prohibited in other ways. Students are allowed, encouraged, and even required to use Generative AI in some ways but are prohibited from using it in other ways. Keep in mind that any content produced by generative AI can "hallucinate" (produce false information), so students are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of any AI-generated content. Examples of citing AI can be found at: <https://libguides.wku.edu/stylewrite/ai>.

Students are permitted and encouraged to use generative AI in the following ways:

- Brainstorming: You may use generative AI to stimulate creativity, generate ideas, or brainstorm topics for papers, presentations, and discussions. The generated content must serve as a steppingstone, not a final product.
- Citation Assistance: AI tools can be used to manage, format, and organize citations and references, promoting adherence to academic writing standards and specific style guides required for individual assignments.
- Grammar and Style Checking: AI-powered writing enhancement tools may be used to help with spelling, grammar, syntax, and stylistic errors.
- Concept Understanding: Generative AI can be used to explain or simulate concepts taught in class, aiding in a deeper understanding.
- Research Assistance: AI can be used to conduct initial research, compile data, and summarize articles, books, or papers. It should not replace traditional research methods but rather enhance them.

You may not use generative AI in coursework in the following ways:

- Plagiarism: Using AI-generated content as your original work without attribution. This includes essays, papers, presentations, and exam answers.
- Data Manipulation: Using AI tools to alter data or create misleading information.
- Misrepresentation of Skills: Using generative AI to complete tasks that are meant to assess your knowledge and skills.
- Confidentiality Breach: Using AI tools that might violate KIIS/university policies or laws

related to data privacy and confidentiality.

Metacognitive Reflection. In addition to a proper citation, the student should include the following statement with any assignment where generative AI is used for assistance.

"I used generative AI [INSERT NAME OF PLATFORM] for assistance in the following ways on this assignment: [INSERT WAYS USED, such as brainstorming, citation assistance, grammar and style checking, concept understanding, and research assistance, etc]."

Disability Accommodation: KIIS will make every reasonable effort to provide accommodations for program participants with special needs or disabilities, but we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. Be aware that many foreign countries do not have comprehensive legislation comparable to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). As a result, businesses and other establishments operating in foreign countries may not be able to provide accommodations.

If you have a disability accommodation need, we recommend you contact your KIIS Campus Representative, <https://www.kiis.org/about-kiis/contact-us/campus-representatives/> early in your program selection process so that s/he has time to discuss any specific needs, including which KIIS programs may be best suited. You also are welcome to contact KIIS Assistant Director, Maria Canning, maria.canning@wku.edu, to discuss your disability accommodation needs (e.g. housing, transportation, excursions, class schedule, etc.).

Immediately after acceptance, notify KIIS Admissions and Enrollment Specialist, Haley McTaggart, haley.mctaggart@wku.edu, if you have a special need or disability that might require any form of accommodation abroad. Failure to notify KIIS may prevent you from participating on your KIIS program.

If you require any accommodations abroad, you must provide KIIS Admissions and Enrollment Specialist, Haley McTaggart, an accommodation letter from your home campus' disability accommodation office that lists the accommodations you are eligible to receive. Please do not request accommodations directly from your KIIS Program Director or other KIIS Faculty; the KIIS Office will notify your KIIS Program Director and/or Faculty after we have received your above accommodation letter.

In some cases, you may need to make arrangements for a caregiver to join you on your KIIS program, should your physician, campus disability accommodation office, or KIIS make such a recommendation or require it.

Title IX / Discrimination & Harassment: Recent attention to gender discrimination and sexual harassment at colleges and universities reminds us of the importance of adhering to standards of ethical and professional behavior. KIIS Study Abroad is committed to supporting and encouraging safe and equitable educational environments for our students, faculty, and program directors.

Students, faculty, and program directors are required to be civil and treat each other with dignity and respect. As such, harassment and/or discrimination of any kind will not be permitted or tolerated.

Sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, sexual assault, and sexual/dating/domestic violence) and sex discrimination are violations of KIIS policies. If you experience an incident of sex/gender-based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct, you are encouraged to report it to a) KIIS Assistant Director, Maria Canning (+1-859-200-1000) or KIIS Executive Director, John Dizgun (+1-270-227-2288), b) WKU's Title IX Coordinator, Ena Demir (270-745-6867 / ena.demir@wku.edu) or WKU's Title IX Investigator, Michael Crowe (270-745-5429 / michael.crowe@wku.edu). Please note that while you may report an incident of sex/gender based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct to a KIIS program director and/or faculty member, KIIS program directors and faculty are considered "Responsible Employees" of Western Kentucky University and MUST report what you share to WKU's Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Investigator.

If you would like to speak with someone who may be able to afford you confidentiality, you may contact WKU's Counseling and Testing Center, <https://www.wku.edu/heretohelp/> at 270-745-3159.

For more information on KIIS Title IX, see <https://www.kiis.org/students/health-safety/title-ix-clery/>; additional Title IX resources can be found here <https://www.wku.edu/titleix/titleixbrochure2020.pdf>.

Everyone should be able to participate on a KIIS program, attend a KIIS event, or work in a KIIS environment (e.g. KIIS office) without fear of sexual harassment or discrimination of any kind. Be respectful of each other.