

**GERMAN 290**  
**GERMANIC MYTHOLOGY**

**BULLETIN INFORMATION**

GERM 290 - Germanic Mythology (3 credit hours)

**Course Description:**

Survey of Germanic mythological and heroic texts from Scandinavia, Germany, and England. History and culture of Germanic tribes, especially the Vikings. The function of myth in society

**SAMPLE COURSE OVERVIEW**

The course is an introduction to the major written (formerly oral) texts in the style of mythological and heroic poetry of the Early Middle Ages in the Germanic countries: Germany, England, and Scandinavia. The history and culture of the Germanic tribes will provide background for the readings from this western tradition which is less studied than the Greco-Roman and Christian traditions. Attention will be paid to Icelandic society at the time the myths and much of the heroic poetry were recorded. The mythologic texts deal with the gods of war, fertility, justice, magic, and learning. In addition to the heroic lays of the *Elder Edda*, we will also read the *Nibelungenlied* and *Beowulf*. No knowledge of German or any prerequisite is required.

**ITEMIZED LEARNING OUTCOMES**

**Upon successful completion of German 290, students will be able to:**

1. Read, evaluate and critically interpret written texts using basic analytic terms, concepts and critical skills, such as historical and cultural context, form and meter of poetry, oral and written transmission, social function of the genres of myth and heroic poetry in religion and society.
2. Apply basic analytical and critical skills to classroom discussion of texts with awareness of society and culture of Germanic speaking countries in the Early Middle Ages.
3. Compare on a basic level Germanic culture and society as manifested in mythical and heroic texts to the better-known Greco-Roman tradition of mythology and heroic poetry, the Christian tradition, and modern western society.
4. Apply learned concepts and analytical and critical skills to presentation and argumentation in written essays.

**SAMPLE REQUIRED TEXTS/SUGGESTED READINGS/MATERIALS**

1. GM = Davidson, H. R. Ellis. 1964. *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*. New York: Penguin.
2. SS = Young, Jean I. trans. 1954. *The Prose Edda of Snorri Sturluson: Tales from Norse Mythology*. Berkeley: U California P.

3. EE = Terry, Patricia, trans. 1990. *Poems of the Elder Edda*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P.
4. HS = Trans. Pálsson, Hermann. 1971. *Hrafnkel's Saga and other Stories*. New York: Penguin. (reserve)
5. GT = Cornelius Tacitus. 1970. *The Agricola and the Germania*. Trans. H. Mattingly and S. A. Handford. New York: Viking Penguin. (reserve)
6. BW = Trans. Wright, David H. 1957. *Beowulf*. New York: Penguin. (reserve)
7. NL = Trans. Hatto, A. T. 1969. *The Nibelungenlied*. New York: Penguin. (reserve)

### **SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS AND/OR EXAM**

1. **Quizzes:** Four times during the semester there will be brief quizzes. The quizzes will have the same types of questions as the exams.
2. **Exams:** Midterm and final exams will each cover the preceding half of the course only. Students will be expected to display a familiarity with the topics treated in the course. Types of question include identifications, quotations, and short essays.
3. **Paper:** A short paper will be required. A choice of paper topics based on class reading assignments will be distributed. No outside reading is required.

### **SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE WITH TIMELINE OF TOPICS, READINGS/ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS/PROJECTS**

- Day 1:** Introduction. GM 9-22
- Day 2:** Snorri and the *Eddas*. GM 23-47; SS 7-28; EE ix-xxvi
- Day 3:** *Germania* and Germanic Values. GT 101-05, 114-21; EE 11-23 / Sayings of the High One
- Day 4:** Icelandic short stories.  
HS 72-108.
- Day 5:** Germanic cosmology. Overview of the Gods.  
SS 29-61; EE 1-4 / *Völuspá*
- Day 6:** Odin/war. GM 48-72; EE 23-24, 36-49 / Sayings, Lays of Grimnir, Lay of Vafthrudnir.
- Day 7:** Odin/magic/poetry. GM 140-49; SS 100-103; EE 25-26.  
Charms (handout), Mead of poetry
- Day 8:** Odin/runes. GT 109-10; EE 31-34, 162-64 / Tacitus runes, Lay of Sigrdrifa  
Quiz 1
- Day 9:** Thor. GM 73-91; GT 110-12; EE 58-71, 90-96 / Lays Harbard, Hymir, Alvis

- Day 10:** Thor. SS 69-78, 103-08 / Battles with giants, Journey to Utgard Loki.
- Day 11:** Njord. GM 92-39; GT 108-10; EE 244-47; SS 97-100, 51-52 / Mill Song, Skadi
- Day 12:** Frey and Freya. EE 50-57 / Skirnir's Journey, Greenland prophetess (handout).
- Day 13:** Loki. GM 163-82; SS 55-56, 66-68, 108-10 / Loki and Svadilfari
- Day 14:** Loki. EE 72-89; SS 84-86 / Lay of Thrym, Insolence of Loki, Loki's punishment.  
Quiz 2
- Day 15:** Death and afterlife. GM 149-62; GT 123-24; SS 63-65; EE 248-53 / Angantyr
- Day 16:** Balder/Ragnarök. GM 182-223; SS 80-84, 86-93, EE 1-10, 241-43 / Balder's  
Dreams, Völuspá.
- Day 17:** Midterm
- Day 18:** Heroic poetry. GT 105-14, The comitatus, Lay of Hildebrand (handout), (SS  
110-17).
- Day 19:** Sigurd and Brynhild. EE 135-68 / Lay of Regin, Lay of Fafnir, Lay of Sigdrifa
- Day 20:** Sigurd and Brynhild. EE 169-91 / Short Lay of Sigurd, Grief of G, B's Journey to  
Hel
- Day 21:** Gudrun and Atli. EE 192-200, 215-30 / Lay of Gudrun, The Greenland Lay of Atli.  
Quiz 3
- Day 22:** Helgi. EE 104-34 / Lay of Helgi Hjorvard's Son, First and Second Lay of Helgi  
Hunding's Bane.
- Day 23:** Beowulf. BW 9-65
- Day 24:** Beowulf. BW 66-101.
- Day 25:** Nibelungenlied. NL 82-94, 111-18 / Brynhild in Worms. How Queens railed at  
each other
- Day 26:** Nibelungenlied. NL 119-40, 265-75 / Death of Siegfried, How Rüdiger was slain.
- Day 27:** Hrafnkel's Saga. HS 1-51.  
Quiz 4

**Day 28:** Hrafnkel's Saga. HS 51-71. Paper due

**Final Exam according to University exam schedule**