Course description:
The course explores the origins and objectives of philosophy in the Prussian Berlin of the 19th century, and also provides a critical perspective on its subsequent history in the 20th century until today. Humboldt University Berlin was founded in 1809/10 under the name “Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität” as a result of revolutionist treatises on university reforms by philosophers in Berlin such as Fichte, Hegel, von Humboldt, and Schleiermacher. In particular, Wilhelm von Humboldt had the idea to create a new kind of university, in which teaching and research form a unity, in which science is independent of political and economic interests, and in which students receive a universal education. Consequently, Humboldt University Berlin became the worldwide paradigm of a new era of university and science. In reading texts written by Berlin-based philosophers before, during, and after the establishment of the Humboldt University, we will trace how ideas relating to the structure and purpose of the university and academic teaching and scientific research changed and were implemented in the course of the last two centuries.

(Reading materials will be made available electronically in both the original German as well as in English translation. Seminar discussion will be in English, but German contributions are welcome.)

Learning objectives:
The objective of this Bachelor-level course is to equip students with an overview of the philosophical activity in Berlin in the 19th century and, in particular, with an in-depth understanding of the philosophical circumstances which led to the establishment of Humboldt University. The course will enable its participants to read and understand central philosophical texts about the idea of the
university, as well as to critically reflect on the question as to how philosophical reasoning can have an actual impact on institutions such as universities.

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

Knowledge

- Understand, describe and identify the core theories about the university by German philosophers (such as Kant, von Humboldt, Schleiermacher, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Marx, Heine, Schopenhauer, and Heidegger)
- Direct independent research on topics discussed in the course

Academic/Transferable Skills

- Analyze and critically reflect on philosophical texts in general
- Select relevant sources and methods for analyzing course-related questions
- Communicate and discuss key concepts in philosophy

Competencies

- Read primary philosophical texts
- Apply relevant theories and concepts in independent work in order to analyze new problems

Assessment:

- Regular attendance, active participation
- Presentation (about 10–15 minutes with questions for the audience + handout)
- Final research essay (Deadline: 5 July 2019; format: about 2000 words, double-spaced, Times New Roman ft.12)

The grade will be composed of the partial grade for the presentation (1/3 of the entire grade) and the partial grade for the research essay (2/3 of the entire grade).

Language requirements:

At least English B2 (and at least German B1) will be required to participate in this class. Since most (but not all) of the course readings are available in English translation, a rather high level of German is required for some of the readings in this course. Depending on the participants, discussion will take place in German or English. Presentations and written essays may be in German or English.

Timetable:
Session 1: 15 April 2020  Opening session

In the first session, we will get an overview of the topics to be covered and the texts to be read in the course of this class, and informally discuss the question as to what a university is.

Session 2: 22 April 2020  Kant’s idea of the university

In the second session, we will ascertain Kant’s view about the role of philosophy in a university, and thereby get an insight into the institutional status of academic philosophy in the 18th century. The philosopher Immanuel Kant was not based in Berlin, yet his little book *The Conflict of the Faculties* from 1798 can be regarded as the origin of the calls for university reform by Berlin-based philosophers such as Fichte, von Humboldt, and Schleiermacher, which led to the establishing of Humboldt University.

Readings:
– Immanuel Kant: *Der Streit der Fakultäten* (1798)

Session 3: 29 April 2020  von Humboldt’s idea of the university

The philosopher and linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt was actively engaged in the institutional founding of Humboldt University Berlin. We will carry out a close reading of two of his programmatic texts regarding the establishment of a new university in Berlin.

Readings:
– Wilhelm von Humboldt: “Antrag auf Errichtung der Universität Berlin” (1809)
– Wilhelm von Humboldt: “Über die innere und äussere Organisation der höheren wissenschaftlichen Anstalten in Berlin” (1809/10)

Session 4: 6 May 2020  Schleiermacher’s idea of the university

The theologian and philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher also actively contributed to the establishment of Humboldt University Berlin. We will study his treatise “Occasional Thoughts on Universities in the German Sense”, and compare it to von Humboldt’s views of the university.

Readings:

Session 5: 13 May 2020  First excursion

We will visit the main building of Humboldt University (which accommodates the Rector’s office, the Philosophy Department, and Hegel’s original desk), as well as the Law Faculty and the Theological Faculty. We will further explore and critically discuss artworks and memorials regarding Fichte’s, Hegel’s, Marx’s, and Heine’s lives and works.

Session 6: 20 May 2020  Fichte’s idea of the university
The philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte was the founder of German Idealism and the first rector of Humboldt University Berlin. We will read selected passages from Fichte’s programmatic treatise “Deduced Scheme for a University to be established in Berlin”, in which Fichte proclaims to derive a theory of the university (including its practical implications) from one single philosophical principle.

Readings:

Session 7: 27 May 2020 Hegel’s idea of the university

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel taught at Humboldt University from 1816 until his death in 1831, and he can count as the most prominent and influential philosopher who ever lived and worked in Berlin. We will read Hegel’s inaugural lecture at Humboldt University from 22 October 1818, as well as a letter by Hegel, in which he expresses his views on teaching philosophy at the universities.

Readings:
– G.W.F. Hegel: “Über den Vortrag der Philosophie auf Universitäten” (1816)
– G.W.F. Hegel: “Berliner Antrittsrede” (1818)
– G.W.F. Hegel: Vorrede zu den Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts (1820)

Session 8: 3 June 2020 Hegel’s view of philosophy

We will take a look at the preface to Hegel’s Elements of the Philosophy of Right, which emerged from his lectures in Berlin, and in which Hegel determines the relationship between reason and reality, as well as the scope and limits of political philosophy.

Readings:
– G.W.F. Hegel: “Über den Vortrag der Philosophie auf Universitäten” (1816)
– G.W.F. Hegel: “Berliner Antrittsrede” (1818)
– G.W.F. Hegel: Vorrede zu den Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts (1820)

Session 9: 10 June 2020 Marx’s view of philosophy

We will read a programmatic and famous essay by the young Karl Marx, which is supposed to be a criticism of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, and in which Marx expresses his own view of philosophy, especially with respect to its revolutionary political potential.

Readings:
– Karl Marx: "Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie" (1843)
– Episode 1 of the Chinese TV show The Leader (2019)

Session 10: 17 June 2020 Heine on German philosophy

We will read Heine’s book On the History of Religion and Philosophy in Germany, in which the Berlin-based poet draws a very amusing picture of German philosophy from Luther to Hegel.
Session 1: 24 June 2020 Schopenhauer’s criticism of academic philosophy
We will read Schopenhauer’s late essay "On Philosophy at the Universities", which he wrote after he had dropped out of his teaching position in Berlin, and in which he polemically argues that philosophy should not be taught at the universities.

Readings:
- Arthur Schopenhauer: "Über Universitäts-Philosophie" (1851)

Session 12: 1 July 2020 Heidegger’s idea of the university
In order to conclude our readings of programmatic writings on philosophy and the university we will gain a critical perspective on that philosophy’s subsequent history. In particular, we will discuss Martin Heidegger’s inaugural address as the Rector of Freiburg University, which is entitled “The Self-Assertion of the German University”. While Heidegger here addresses the definition of university and the problem of academic freedom, this speech also documents Heidegger’s entanglement with Nazism.

Readings:
- Martin Heidegger: „Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität“ (1933)

Session 13: 8 July 2020 The Bologna Process and the future of the university
In this session, we will reflect on our previous readings and discussion results by drawing a critical comparison between the received philosophical views on the university on the one hand and the aims and decisions of the Bologna Process (1999) on the other. Especially, the Bologna Reform’s requirement to separate teaching from research seems to conflict with both philosophical views and academic practice.

Extracurricular session: Friday, 10 July 2020 Second excursion
In this extracurricular session, we will visit the Medical Campus and the Berlin Museum of Medical History at the Charité – University Medicine to reconstruct the formation and development of the Medical Faculty in Berlin. In addition, we will have a walk on the adjacent Dorotheenstadt Cemetery, where Berlin-based philosophers such as Fichte, Hegel, and Marcuse, and literary authors such as Bertolt Brecht and Heiner Mueller are buried, and talk about their respective lives and works.

(Note that participation in this second excursion is not obligatory.)

Session 14: 15 July 2020 Final session
In our final session, we will have the opportunity to talk with a contemporary Berlin-based philosopher and interview her/him about her/his own views on the nature of philosophy & the university.

Preliminary bibliography:

Primary texts (in German):


Primary texts in English translation:

– Schleiermacher, Friedrich: Occasional thoughts on universities in the German sense with an appendix regarding a university soon to be established (1808); translated and annotated by Terrence N. Tice, with Edwina Lawler, San Francisco: EM TEXT, 1991.

Remarks:

– Attendance policy (Humboldt University rules: 80% attendance needed in order to pass; absences need to be excused and certified)