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# Undergraduate Holocaust Education and Biomedical Ethics: What's the Connection?

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE HOLOCAUST AND CONTEMPORARY MEDICAL ETHICS: WHAT IS THE CONNECTION?

- The Holocaust laid the foundation for contemporary medical ethics today.
  - Forced sterilization laws and euthanasia program
  - Nazi experiments on concentration camp inmates
  - Nuremberg Doctors Trial and the Nuremberg Code

### AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLOCAUST AMONG AMERICANS IS LOW AND IS DECREASING

- Claims Conference (2019) found that there are critical gaps in both awareness and basic knowledge of the Holocaust.
  - 31% of all Americans and 41% of millennials believe less than 2 million Jews were murdered.
  - 41% of Americans can not name a single concentration camp although there were over 40,00 of them.

### LOW HOLOCAUST AWARENESS IS NOT DUE TO A LACK OF INTEREST

- 93% of Americans believe we should be taught about the Holocaust.
- 80% assert that the Holocaust is important to learn about so it never happens again.

### HOLOCAUST EDUCATION BECOMES A NATIONAL PRIORITY

- "Never Again Education Act" - Federal Legislation passed in 2019
  - Enacted in response to a national lack of resources allocated to teaching the Holocaust at the grammar and high school level.

### RECENT INITIATIVES AIM TO INCLUDE HOLOCAUST EDUCATION IN THE CURRICULUM FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONS

- Lancet Commission on Holocaust Education
- University of Colorado Center for Bioethics and Humanities
- University of Southern California Shoah Foundation

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

- How widespread is Holocaust education in undergraduate colleges and universities?
  - Study 1: Inventory of course descriptions in a sampling of small liberal arts colleges (SLAC), and in larger public and private research universities (R1 public and R1 private).
- Does Holocaust education emphasize the importance of the medical establishment in providing scientific legitimacy to the Nazi racial ideology?
  - Study 2: Survey of topics taught in a sample of Holocaust courses described by Study 1 results.

## METHODS

### Study 1: Inventory of Holocaust-related Courses in Small Liberal Arts Colleges and in Research Universities

- Selection criteria for Small Liberal Arts Colleges:
  - Four year, exclusive undergraduate college, private, small (under 3,000 student body), residential.
  - Yielded 39 SLACs that were then sorted by geographic location: Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, and West
- Selection criteria for Private and Public Research (R1) Universities:
  - Four-year colleges that offered bachelor of arts degrees, matched SLACs with respect to geographic location.
  - Yielded 15 private and 18 public R1 universities.
- Online Course Description Search
  - Primary search terms - Holocaust, Jews, Nazi, or genocide
  - Secondary search terms - eugenics or euthanasia

## METHODS

### Study 2: Survey of Holocaust-related Courses in Small Liberal Arts Colleges and Research Universities

- Questionnaire to capture course information beyond that available in a course description.
  - Questions about the instructor
    - Departmental affiliation and years of experience
  - Questions about the course format, intended audience, and relationship to broader curriculum
    - Size of class and delivery method (i.e., lecture, seminar)
    - Class year
    - Fulfillment of major requirements, general education requirements, etc.
  - Questions about course content
    - 20 topics found commonly in Holocaust-related courses.
    - Historiographic importance of competing ideas regarding the genesis of the Holocaust and the motivation of the killers.
- Sent electronically to 128 instructors of courses inventoried in Study 1.
  - SLAC (n=51), Private R1 (n=44), Public R1 (n=33)

## RESULTS

### Study 1: Inventory of Holocaust-related Courses in Small Liberal Arts Colleges and in Research Universities

	Number of Courses with Primary Search Terms	Number of Courses with Primary and Secondary Search Terms	% of Courses with Primary and Secondary Search Terms
SLAC	22.7 ± 2.0	0.3 ± 0.1	1.3% ± 0.6%
R1 Private	55.9 ± 5.9	0.3 ± 0.1	0.4% ± 0.2%
R1 Public	18.4 ± 3.5	0.06 ± 0.1	0.11% ± 0.06%

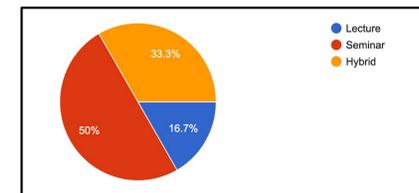
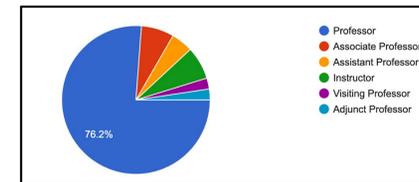
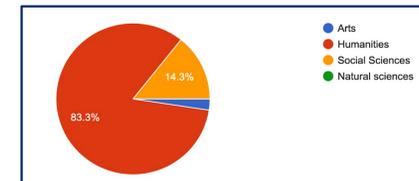
Table 1: The data are of means +/- SEM of courses that included any of the primary search terms, primary and at least one of the secondary search terms, and the percentage of courses that included secondary search terms as a function of those that used only primary search terms.

- The average number of Holocaust courses differs among different undergraduate institutions.
  - The larger number of Holocaust-related courses in R1 private schools relative to SLACs may be attributed to their larger size.
  - The larger number of such courses in R1 private schools relative to R1 public schools may be attributed to greater resources.
- The proportion of Holocaust courses that include eugenics or euthanasia is very small.
  - Among SLACs the proportion of such courses is 3 to 10 times greater than found in R1 private or R1 public schools, respectively.
  - The greater proportion of such courses at SLACs may reflect the broader and more rounded perspectives of an liberal arts education.

## RESULTS (continued)

### Study 2: Survey of Holocaust-related Courses in Small Liberal Arts Colleges and Research Universities

- Response rate was 31%. Of the 128 faculty members contacted, 40 completed the questionnaire.
  - SLACs - 33%. Of the 51 faculty members in this cohort, 17 responded.
  - Private R1 - 30%. Of the 44 faculty members in this group, 13 responded.
  - Public R1 - 30%. Of the 33 faculty members in this category, 10 replied.



- Large majority of respondents were from the humanities.
  - Unsurprisingly, not a single respondent came from a natural sciences department.
- Largest majority (76%) of respondents were full professors.
- Course format was mostly seminar, with up to 20 students in the class.

### COURSE CONTENT

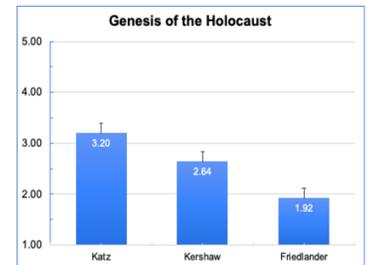
- Most frequently included in Holocaust courses were:
  - Concentration camps and death camps (93%)
  - Nuremberg Laws; e.g. forced sterilization, race laws (81%)
  - Antecedents - Religious antisemitism (79%)
  - Final solution - Wannsee Conference, Operation Reinhard (79%)
  - Ghettos in German occupied Europe (76%)
- Least frequently included in Holocaust courses were:
  - Nazi eponyms; e.g. Asperger's syndrome, Penkopf atlas (2%)
  - Nuremberg Doctors trials (14%)
  - Nuremberg code (19%)
  - Prisoner functionaries (26%)
  - SS doctors in concentration camps (26%)
- Central to biomedical concerns in a Holocaust course were topics that were included in a moderate number of courses:
  - Eugenics and racial science included in 71% of the courses.
  - Euthanasia included in 62% of the courses.

## ISSUES OF HISTORIOGRAPHIC IMPORTANCE

- About the genesis of the Holocaust, respondents were asked to rate the following three views on a 5 point scale, with 1 being the most important, and 5 being the least important:
  - "The thesis of the moral insensibility of Jews, their putative drive for world domination and the like... was clearly derived from traditional Christian concepts of Jewish mentality and Jewish messianic aspirations" - Jacob Katz
  - "Without Hitler, and the unique regime he headed, the creation of a program to bring about the physical extermination of the Jews of Europe would have been unthinkable" - Ian Kershaw
  - "The entire killing enterprise had started in January 1940 with the murder of... institutionalized handicapped patients, had expanded in 1941 to include Jews and Gypsies, and had by 1945 cost the lives of at least 6 million men, women, and children." - Henry Friedlander

The most favored historiographic understanding of the genesis of the Holocaust was that expressed by Friedlander.

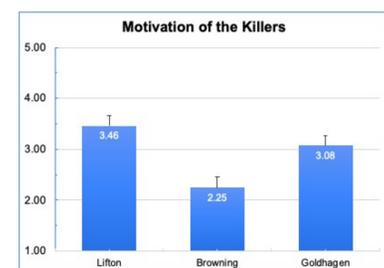
Paired-samples t-tests showed the rating for Friedlander to be significantly lower than either Katz,  $t(39) = 5.33, p < .00001$ ; or Kershaw,  $t(39) = 3.47, p < .0006$ . Kershaw was also preferred over Katz,  $t(39) = 2.39, p < .01$ .



- About the motivation of the killers, respondents were asked to rate the following three views on a 5 point scale, with 1 being the most important, and 5 the least important:
  - "The key to understanding how Nazi doctors came to do the work of Auschwitz is the psychological principle I call "doubling;" the division of self into two functioning wholes, so that a part-self acts as an entire self. Auschwitz doctors could, through doubling, not only kill... but organize... all aspects of his behavior." - Robert Jay Lifton
  - "To break ranks and step out, to adopt overtly nonconformist behavior; was simply beyond most of the men. It was easier for them to shoot.... If the men of Reserve Battalion 101 could become killers under such circumstances, what group of men cannot?" - Christopher R. Browning
  - "Not economic hardship, not the coercive means of the totalitarian state, not social psychological pressure, not invariable psychological propensities, but ideas about the Jews that were pervasive in Germany, and had been for decades induces ordinary Germans to kill... systematically and without pity." - Daniel Jonah Goldhagen

The most favored historiographic understanding of the motivation of the killers was that expressed by Browning.

Paired-samples t-tests showed the rating for Browning to be significantly lower than either Lifton,  $t(39) = 6.21, p < .00001$ ; or Goldhagen,  $t(39) = 2.86, p < .003$ . The preference for Goldhagen over Lifton did not reach statistical significance,  $t(39) = 1.63, p = .06$ .



## CONCLUSIONS

- R1 private universities offer a greater number of Holocaust courses than either R1 public universities or SLACs.
- However, the proportion of courses that include euthanasia or eugenics in their course descriptions is greatest for SLACs.
- Holocaust course are offered primarily by faculty in the humanities, and they are predominantly full professors.
- Topics that are expected to emphasize biomedical concerns are not frequently included in Holocaust courses.
- Paradoxically, the historiographic view regarding the genesis of the Holocaust that includes euthanasia was rated as most important.
- Browning's view that social pressures could turn ordinary men into killers was most favored.

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