

# GERMAN STUDIES (GMAN)

\* GMAN 0400a / HUMS 0410a, **The Top Ten: Best Books of the 21st Century** Sophie Schweiger

In 2025, *The New York Times* published a list of “The Best 100 Books of the 21st Century.” We will not read all of them. Instead, we will ask what it means to rank literature in the first place, as our class takes a closer look at some the different measures by which books can be made subject to a ranking—for example: sales numbers, expert opinion, and critical acclaim, or success through translation and adaptation. We study the different ways of awarding book prizes and curating lists of literature. Additionally, we study the circumstances that lead to literary “hypes,” including Netflix adaptations, BookTok, and the author-as-celebrity. We read novels and excerpts of novels by some of the *New York Times*’ top-ranked authors, as well as by Nobel Prize laureates of recent years, and compare the different modes of selection and the benefits as well as biases inherent to the respective lists. We also look at currently circulating lists of “banned books” and the works of literature banned from official reading lists and syllabi to understand another aspect of the politics behind the curation of lists. We close our literary journey with a text by author Toni Morrison who, curiously, made all three lists. Enrollment limited to first-year students. HU