

**Dr. Nathan Stoltzfus**

**Seminar: *Hitler Biographies: A Popular (Pioneering?) Dictator?***

**T 3-6pm**

For decades scholars and others have exclaimed about the sheer and growing quantity written on Nazi Germany. Yet the more that is written the more there is to write, not only because of historiographical disputes, nor only because Hitler exerted so much impact on history, but particularly because these studies illuminate the great array of human behaviors acutely illustrated by the extreme contexts of war, genocide, and a leader so many followed as awesomely great. Each new generation also poses new questions: older biographies barely touch on gender while newer volumes show growth in this consequential perspective. An urgent question today is whether and if so how Hitler's management of his own "German-blooded race" is a forerunner of today's popular dictatorships. Although frequently paired with Stalin as a "classic" dictator who used naked force to gain whatever he wanted, Hitler—to govern his own "race"—also used "soft power *tactics* associated with strongmen today skilled in mass psychology who have also taken power by constitutional means. Which persons and institutions (i.e., the German army) share responsibility for the Holocaust? We will examine other key questions including: How did this extreme outsider concentrate so much power in his own hands so quickly? What was Hitler's role in the radicalization of German antisemitism and is the intentionalist-functionalist debate still useful? Does belittling him satisfy the need for moral judgments in lieu of serious study of how autocrats function? We will trace the development of biographies over time, with limited contextual readings such as excerpts from Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power* and the debates between Martin Broszat and Saul Friedlander on whether Hitler can be historicized like any other figure.