

# German Program Assessment Report

Wayne Oudekerk

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## Summary of past decisions

**Please summarize up to three departmental changes made since the last HLC visit (08-09) the impetus for those changes and any changes to information gathering about student development.**

*The most momentous change to the German program was undoubtedly the College's 2009 decision not to renew the contract of Dr. Elizabeth Bridges, a visiting instructor of German. This, coupled with the unavailability of suitable adjuncts locally (a moot point, since adjunct hiring has recently been frozen for the program), has been the impetus for a gradual "streamlining" of program offerings. By converting the capstone senior seminar to an independent study (meeting 2 ½ hours each week!) and reducing the variety of courses taught – I only offer one section each of 110, 120, 210 and 230 respectively each year, and have established a fixed three-year rotating pattern of upper-level courses for the fall and the spring semester respectively – it has been possible to maintain a bare-bones German major.*

*There have been no significant changes to the ways in which I collect information about student development.*

## Looking forward

**Please summarize your department's focus for student development and your evaluation methods.**

*I intend to focus more attention in the coming year on oral proficiency, with an eye towards significantly improving the students' ability to express themselves verbally with clarity and confidence. Three specific contexts in which I hope to work towards this goal are 1) the Hendrix-in-Bonn program being inaugurated this coming May, 2) German Immersion House 2017-18, and 3) German 310 Advanced Composition and Conversation, being offered in the spring of 2018.*

*My thoughts on information gathering and evaluation in these three areas are as follows:*

- 1) The Hendrix-in-Bonn program enrolls students in four weeks of intensive study (20+ contact hours per week) of spoken German at the Goethe-Institute in Bonn, for which they receive course credit for German 215 Language Immersion in Germany. I am very excited to finally be able (after 28 years teaching German here!) to offer my students an entire academic course in which the focus is solely on oral expression. While I am confident that each of the students will*

*progress significantly in their facility in the spoken language, I will have to rely on my consultations with the students' individual course instructors and on the results of the students' placement (entrance) and exit examinations to give me a more objective measure of the progress they make.*

- 2) German Immersion House 2017-18 will allow 14 Hendrix students with widely varying levels of ability in the spoken language to live together in Smith House for a full year, where they will be expected to use the language in the common areas, prepare and eat 4-5 dinners per week together, and participate in brief weekly culture programs, all under the direction of a native speaker of the language. Although any form of explicit "skills testing" would of course run very much counter to our efforts to create a welcoming, low-stress living / learning environment, I nevertheless intend to gather information on the effectiveness of this limited language immersion experience in promoting oral proficiency in at least the following three ways: a) have all participants fill out entrance and exit surveys which include perceptions of their ability in the language, b) ask the resident director to keep a running record of activities used to promote active use of the target language in the House and hopefully their effectiveness, and c) have dinner at the House myself on roughly a bi-weekly basis in order to gain a personal impression of how the students are progressing.*
- 3) Since no other course offered on campus focuses solely on language skills for more advanced German speakers, teaching German 310 Advance Composition and Conversation next spring offers me a unique opportunity to experiment with new techniques for promoting oral proficiency. However, beyond my intent to place less emphasis on advanced grammar and vocabulary building in order to have more time for classroom use of the spoken language, I have not yet had time to formulate any clear ideas of what metrics I will use in the course in order to actually measure the progress my students make in their spoken command of the language. One attractive possibility I'm aware of involves outside evaluation: student take the 30-minute German Oral Proficiency Interview conducted over the phone by certified evaluators from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. The cost may prove prohibitive, but I will pursue the possibility of the Hendrix-Murphy Foundation funding the interviews.*

### **Achieving departmental goals for students**

**Please explain how your departmental curriculum achieves your student learning goals, being sure to include the Capstone. Feel free to attach a curricular map or other supporting documents. Summarize the ways your department provides guidance in the effective use of research and information resources.**

*The learning goals of the German program can be divided into three broad subcategories: first-year, second-year and upper-level course learning goals.*

#### **A. First-year sequence learning goals (German 110 and 120)**

*Student learning goals in the first-year sequence have to reflect the fact that, for roughly two-thirds of the students, this will be their only systematic academic exposure to the German language and culture. This implies that the students should acquire on the one hand a minimal level of language skill, but also that they should be given every opportunity to develop a longer-term curiosity about languages and cultures other than their own. The former -- and admittedly primary -- goal is accomplished principally through the systematic teaching, in-class student usage and rigorous testing of most of the vocabulary and all the grammatical structures in our entire first-year textbook. The latter -- the heightening of student awareness of and hopefully life-long interest in other cultures -- is fostered by curricular features imbedded in the first-year sequence, including discussion of cultural readings in each chapter of the textbook, the inclusion of excerpts from a required English-language cultural reader in nearly every chapter, and frequent screenings of video recordings, PowerPoint presentations and audio recordings from the target culture.*

#### **B. Second-year sequence learning goals (German 210 and 230)**

*In the second year, the students' increased language ability and generally keen interest in the language and culture allow a shift from the "four skills" to more content-based instruction. Of course, students do continue refining these skills and working on vocabulary acquisition, but the focus is increasingly on acquiring basic historical, social, and "big C" cultural insights as part of a first systematic exposure to highlights of the rich German cultural traditions in art, architecture, music, film and literature. Especially in the second-semester course, exercises such as graded student poetry readings, classroom film critiques, longer-format oral presentations on topics of their own choosing and a hybrid written/discussion-based final exam ensure that the students are actively involved in encountering what I sometime call the "greatest hits" of German high culture in the target language.*

#### **C. Upper-level course learning goals**

*Students in upper-level German courses are almost invariably majors or minors, most of whom will be studying abroad or have already done so. The heart of the curriculum at this level is the two-course Survey of German Literature and Civilization sequence (320 & 330, one of which is required for the major). These two courses stress how the "worldview" of each individual historico-cultural period manifests itself in multiple ways, e.g. how Baroque thought and experience can be seen in the sonnets, the fugues, the palaces and the paintings of that age. Direct assessment tools in these courses include three papers, a graded classroom presentation, two "mid-term" examinations and a comprehensive final.*

*A secondary cluster of program learning goals centers around fostering in the student a solid understanding of key aspects of contemporary life in Germany: both German 395 Contemporary German Civilization (an overview of German history and institutions from 1918 to the present) and German 490 German Culture through Film address this issue. Assessment tools used to measure how well students have met these goals closely resemble those used in the 320 / 330 sequence described in the preceding paragraph.*

*As concerns the Capstone experience, German 420, Senior Seminar in German Literary History, its learning goals are basically threefold: successful completion of the experience means that students have a) a broad-based overview of German political and cultural history up to reunification, b) a comprehensive grasp of key concepts used in the analysis of German poetry, prose and drama, and c) an understanding of key aspects of all major periods in German literary history from the 17<sup>th</sup> through the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The second half of the course in particular is dedicated to examining specifically those literary periods which have hitherto received little attention in the students' other coursework. In terms of ensuring that these goals are met, the students take separate comprehensive exams in each of these three areas – cultural history, literary analysis, and literary periods / authors / works – and thus demonstrate that they have mastered an immense corpus of material at a level roughly comparable to that achieved by previous generations of German majors.*

*Given the challenges which original-language content, reference works and critiques pose to non-native speakers, systematic guidance in research skills begins in earnest at the third-year level. Most of the upper-level courses have distinct features built into the curriculum which promote these skills. Examples of this include group “tours” of German-specific research materials in Bailey library (320 and 330), two separate “scavenger hunt” research papers requiring students to forage through a broad swath of print resources and online resources respectively (395), one-off classroom visits by colleagues specializing in fields we are studying (especially 490, the film course), written and oral reports on language acquisition resources available online (310 Advanced Comp and Conversation), and so on.*

### **Your department's role in achieving the college's shared goals for students**

**Please explain how your departmental learning goals contribute to the Vision for Student Learning Goals. Feel free to attach a map or other supporting documents.**

*This is by far the most challenging part of this report. I'm just glad this is not a graded assignment, because I would likely have failed this section, although I suspect that I'm not the only instructor on this campus who focuses pretty consistently on how individual assignment learning goals reflect overall course learning goals, reflects occasionally on how course learning goals reflect program learning goals, but almost never stops to ponder how program goals might map onto college-wide learning goals!*

*Speaking of mapping: after sitting blankly in front of the monitor for several minutes, I took your advice and attempted a mapping using the grid you helpfully provided. I quickly discovered that the only way this exercise made sense to me personally was to look not so much at how German program learning goals mapped onto the VSLGs, but rather at how specific German course learning goals coincided with the list of goals you'd provided. It quickly became apparent that the German program contributes precious little indeed to the VSLGs listed in sections three and four! I have attached this document, for what it's worth.*