

Department of Germanic Languages and Literature Duke University

Mission Statement

The Department of Germanic Languages and Literature is the University's center for the study of German culture as well as the German language itself. From the early medieval period, through the Renaissance and Reformation, to the Enlightenment and Romanticism, down to the twentieth century and beyond, the course of human civilization is inseparable—both for good and for ill—from the impact of German and other German-speaking thinkers, writers, artists, scientists, and politicians. The department views an encounter with this heritage and the influence it continues to exert in the world of today in a host of different fields as an integral component of a liberal arts education, whatever the particular area of concentration. Pursuing a threefold mission of teaching, scholarly research and publication, and service and outreach, the department engages as its principal constituencies Duke University students, undergraduate and graduate; colleagues in German Studies, both members of the University faculty and individuals at other institutions; and individuals, communities, and institutions outside academe with an interest in German history, culture, and society.

Educational Goals

The principal focus of the department's activities is the culture of the German-speaking peoples, with particular attention to language, literature, film as well as new media, viewed in both historical and contemporary perspective. Students in the department develop an advanced level of proficiency in the German language, spoken and written, and acquire a broad knowledge of the German cultural tradition and its contemporary reality. In addition, they develop and refine skills with application beyond the field of German Studies alone, including:

- an ability to *analyze* and *interpret*, in particular to analyze and interpret *texts* of all sorts
- an ability to *express* discoveries and insights in cogent and persuasive fashion, both orally and in writing
- an ability to formulate and to carry out *research*, and to do so increasingly independently
- an ability to *think globally*, to understand themselves and the world from multiple perspectives.

In furtherance of these goals, the department makes available numerous opportunities for independent, or semi-independent, scholarly research and artistic projects, as well as for interdisciplinary and experiential learning, both on campus and abroad.

In all its activities, the department seeks to contribute to the realization in its students of capacities for critical thinking, creativity, and continuing self-guided growth and development.

The Curriculum

The most important locus of department activity, and the principal vehicle for accomplishing its mission, is the *curriculum*. The department offers courses conducted both in German and in English, taught both at the University's Durham campus and in Berlin, and geared both for students pursuing a concentration in German and for those in other fields.

The department offers coursework in the German language, at all levels from introductory to advanced. Students develop an ability to speak, understand, read, and write fluent and idiomatic German while simultaneously developing skills in critical thinking and rigorous analysis. At the same time, the department's language program initiates students' introduction to German culture at large through a variety of in-class and extra-curricular activities. For many students, the work begun in this way in Durham is continued, and considerably expanded, in one of the department's several Study Abroad programs in Berlin.

Beyond the language program itself, the department offers a full range of courses covering the field of German Studies. Some of these are taught in German, some in English. In format they run the gamut from small seminars to large lecture courses. The levels at which they are taught range from first-year seminars to advanced work for upper-division majors and graduate students. And, as with the department's language courses, some are taught in Durham and some in Berlin.

Department faculty offer courses both on campus and abroad. On campus, they are regularly joined by colleagues from Germany. In Berlin, students benefit from instruction by native speakers of German, some affiliated directly with our Berlin programs, others members of the faculties of the three major universities located in Berlin. Both on campus, and especially in Germany, students' in-class work is augmented by a host of curricular and extra-curricular offerings involving excursions to sites of major cultural, historical, and political significance.

Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Focus

The department is committed not only to the centrality of literary studies in the German Studies curriculum, but also to the study of film, new media and visual studies more generally. Faculty teach the canonical works—literary and filmic—of the German tradition, as well as texts associated with key moments in German political and social history. The department reflects in its pedagogical and scholarly mission two fundamental developments in humanistic study over the last fifty years: first, the expansion of the notion of literature itself to include a greater range of forms and varieties of textual representation and communication than traditionally recognized; and, secondly, the recontextualization of the literary itself within a still larger range of societal phenomena. In our field, this development is often spoken of as a movement from *Germanistik* to German Studies. It brings with it at once the possibility and the necessity of teaching, along with works of literature, materials drawn from such fields as history, philosophy, music, and the fine arts, as well as political science, economics, media studies and popular culture. And with this comes the ongoing challenge of integrating such disparate and manifold material to a coherent whole for presentation to our students.

To an extent, this is simply another way of saying that German Studies today is, and must be, *interdisciplinary* throughout. And that fact in turn points to the key role played by colleagues from other areas in fulfilling the mission of the German Department. This is something the department fully acknowledges—indeed welcomes—and seeks to reflect in the composition, structure, and oversight of its curriculum. At the same time, there is a complementary movement to be noted here in the other direction. And that is the no less vital need for the German Department to be involved in, and to actively contribute to, the University's overall commitment to interdisciplinarity in whatever ways possible, through any of a number of collaborative undertakings with other departments and programs. In this way, both the department's mission in particular and the University's mission at large intersect and contribute reciprocally, each to the fulfillment of the other. *Disciplinarity* and *interdisciplinarity* are each indispensable, but each is also, in the absence of the other, incomplete. To paraphrase Kant's famous dictum in the first *Critique* regarding concepts and intuitions, in the University of today—and in this Duke rightly aspires to a leadership role—disciplinarity without interdisciplinarity lacks vision, interdisciplinarity without disciplinarity lacks focus.