

Ten-Year Review of the Department of Germanics  
University of Washington  
17 December 2008

BA in German Cultural Studies  
BA in German Language and Literature  
MA in Germanics  
PhD in Germanics

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**Summary of Process**

A meeting of the Committee members with the chair of Germanics, representatives of the Graduate School, the College of Arts and Sciences, and Undergraduate Academic Affairs was held on Thursday 23 October 2008 from 3 pm to 4 pm, in which the Committee's charge in the review was discussed. Committee members Scott Noegel and Cynthia Steele were present, while James Clauss (chair) and external members Benjamin Bennett (University of Virginia) and Sabine Hake (University of Texas) communicated by phone. By the time of the meeting, all members had already read the 2008 Self-Study prepared by the department and were ready to proceed to the site visit, which was held at the University of Washington on Monday and Tuesday, November 17-18, 2008.

During the site visit, which took place in Denny Hall 308 (Rey Library), we interviewed the following constituencies, although not in this order:

- Department Chair (Sabine Wilke)
- Undergraduate Advisor (Charles Barrack/Eric Ames)
- Graduate Advisor (Richard Gray)
- Language Program Coordinators (Manfred Bansleben and Klaus Brandl)
- Other Department Faculty:
  - Eric Ames
  - Hellmut Ammerlahn (Emeritus)
  - Diana Behler
  - Richard Block (on sabbatical), whom we interviewed before the site visit
  - Jane Brown
  - Brigitte Prutti
  - Joe Voyles

- Graduate Students
- Undergraduate Majors
- Department Administrator (Heidi Tilghman)
- Department Staff (Kate Howe and Stephanie Welch)
- Professor Steven Pfaff, Director of the Center for West European Studies

At the conclusion of the interviews, at noon of the second day, the committee met for two hours to discuss our preliminary findings. Immediately afterwards we held our exit discussion with Sabine Wilke, department chair; Robert Stacey, Divisional Dean, Arts and Humanities; Janice DeCosmo, Associate Dean in UAA; James Antony, Associate Dean for Academic Programs, Graduate School; and Augustine McCaffery, Senior Academic Program Specialist, Graduate School. Douglas Wadden, Executive Vice Provost for Academic Affairs and Planning, was unavailable. This meeting was followed by a continuation of the exit discussion without the chair. The site visit concluded with a final discussion by the committee. Everything went as planned and the committee learned more than enough about the department to comment on its current status and to make what we hope are constructive recommendations.

## **Findings**

### **German Language Program**

The German Language Program continues to be strong. Manfred Bansleben, who has developed and overseen the program for a number of years, is now retired but still oversees the program after the first year of study. Klaus Brandl (50%), whose specialty is in language teaching and who works with other language departments and the Language Learning Center, is presently in charge of the first-year program and teaches a pedagogy seminar to first-year Germanics TAs. The fact that a tenured/tenure-line professor has traditionally been in charge of the entire program is seen by the department as a significant strength that they are loath to give up. In fact, the first two years of study, taught primarily by TAs, is managed so closely that all instructors, including faculty, are given day-to-day lesson plans.

Unlike many other language departments on campus, Germanics relies mostly on graduate student TAs and some tenured/tenure-track faculty, rather than lecturers and associates, to teach the first- and second-year courses. While some faculty would prefer not to teach basic language courses, most of the people we spoke with continue to see this as a strength of the department. Some of the faculty interviewed noted that a larger burden for teaching language courses tends to fall to the native speakers among them. Over the past few years several of these courses have been taught by the department's one lecturer, Stephanie Gunther, who will be departing at the end of this year and has not been replaced.

Student numbers are strong. This Autumn, 163 students began the study of German (101), while 40 are in German 103 and 59 in German 111 (review of first-year German). There are 79 in second-year language courses, 59 in third-year courses, and 28 in fourth-

year courses. Such high numbers speak well of TA preparation and support the department's perception of its success in its language program. While the first year of language instruction emphasizes speaking skills, the second year incorporates more reading and the third-year, elements of conversation and writing. Fourth-year courses focus on speaking and reading skills, but very little on composition. In upper-division literature courses the students are allowed to write their essays, and the class discussions are conducted in, either German or English.

Dr. Brandl reported that he had initiated computer-assisted language courses in the Germanics Department in 2005 and that, while he has not yet collected data on student satisfaction with these courses, surveys of Spanish students using the same system had reported that one-fourth of the students had a favorable response to the program, one-fourth an unfavorable response, and the remaining 50% were ambivalent. These figures suggest that it might be reasonable at this time to reevaluate the usefulness of such courses. In the previous review, it was suggested that the department consider initiating a translation certification program. We learned that Paul Aoki, director of the Language Learning Center, had begun looking into the implementation of such a program but that the issue had not been pursued.

Bansleben and Brandl noted that interest in the language program had spiked in the late 1990s, in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall, and then declined by 12% in subsequent years. One problem they pointed to was that, although some high schools in Washington state still offer German language classes, not a single public high school in Seattle does so at this point. The committee believes that the diminishing of German language instruction in the secondary schools is short-sighted and urges the University to continue its support of the German language program.

Germanics is currently searching for a new assistant professor; their preference would be to have this new colleague continue Bansleben's oversight of the entire language series, since they feel that this strategy has been pivotal to building the strong language program that they currently have. However, doing so would have the disadvantage of limiting the new colleague's role in the classroom and in graduate and major advising. If they are to pursue this course, they would want reassurances from the College that language pedagogy would be an acceptable area of research for tenure and promotion decisions.

### **Undergraduate Program**

The number of students choosing German as an undergraduate major has shrunk nationwide over the past decades. While there was a short-lived increase after German unification, this interest has not held up. That said, the department nonetheless continues to attract a significant number of undergraduates who choose Germanics as their major. (Double majors are not tracked as such, something which would be worth doing here and in other departments). On the basis of the information we were provided, the number of majors shows a decline from 93 in 1998 to the 60 identified in the Spring of this year. This decline is consistent with national patterns and is not at this point troubling, particularly in light of the continued large numbers of undergraduates enrolled in

Germanics classes. In addition to the undergraduate major, the department also offers a minor; the number of minors averages in the high teens-low twenties.

In response to national pedagogical trends in the 1980s, the department divided its major into two tracks, German Language and Literature and German Cultural Studies. However, in the ensuing years student interests have become broader and the faculty has recently decided to combine the two into a single track integrating language, literature and cultural studies. The integration is clearest in the requirement that all majors must take both German 311 (Introduction to German Literary Studies) and German 312 (Introduction to German Cultural Studies). We believe that this was a wise move and will contribute to a more integrated curriculum and a more cohesive group of majors. The presence of an active German club also reflects the positive esprit de corps.

From what we have learned, the chair of the department and the faculty Director of Undergraduate Studies oversee the undergraduate program: the chair manages the curriculum, while the faculty advisor is responsible for helping all majors plan and complete the requirements for their degrees. Although the faculty advisor (normally Eric Ames, or Charles Barrack during his leave of absence) is assisted by a staff member, half-time undergraduate specialist Stephanie Welch, it appears that he does the lion's share of the work involved in advising, from routine paperwork to more substantial mentoring. While he does receive a one-course reduction for this role, the department may want to consider shifting additional advising tasks to staff members and reserving the faculty advisor's time for the less routine matters. Also, they may want to consider involving one or two additional faculty members in scheduling the curriculum, to enhance the faculty's sense of involvement in the process.

When we met with several undergraduates, they all expressed clear satisfaction with and genuine enthusiasm for the language program. We noted that, with the exception of one of the students, they were double majoring or studying German as a supplement to their work in other areas (e.g. art history, environmental studies, ambassadorial work, even one in the hospitality industry). Among various questions, we asked them why they thought students today might shy away from the study of German and their answers were interesting: Romance languages were more appealing; German was reputed to be difficult; few students today are exposed to German culture; U.S. cinema continues to foster negative stereotypes of Germans as Nazis.

Our impression, from this brief encounter, was that the students indicated a lack of familiarity with and interest in faculty research in the department. The department may want to consider involving undergraduates more extensively in faculty research, for instance through the Mary Gates Undergraduate Scholarship Program. Also, while their primary purpose is not to prepare undergraduates for graduate studies in Germanics, we would encourage them to continue thinking of their most highly motivated majors as potential graduate students and to keep in mind that undergraduate integration into faculty research can serve to further strengthen the major.

In an atmosphere in which universities are rethinking their language requirements, faculty in the language departments understandably feel under siege. They fear that, if enrollments decline due to relaxation or elimination of the language requirement, their faculty numbers may shrink and may even threaten their integrity as separate departments. Now that the language program in Germanics is on such sure footing, it is an appropriate time for the department to consider designing courses for majors that engage undergraduate majors intellectually, forging a connection between language learning and critical thinking, and promoting the value of German studies as a discipline in its own right. Given the excellence of the faculty, this should be an easy task; given the size of the faculty, it will be a considerable challenge.

In its engagement with other undergraduate programs and with undergraduates in general, the department has long cross-listed courses with linguistics, CHID, and comparative literature; and it is beginning to offer courses in the Center for West European Studies (CWES), a Title VI Center in the Jackson School (a course on the History of Romanticism, another on the History of the Enlightenment, and trailer courses in German). Germanics also offers a number of courses taught in English (Classics of German Literature and Thought, Jews and German Culture, Goethe in English, Freud and the Literary Imagination, etc.). This is an excellent strategy for drawing students to the study of Germanics and fostering potential majors and double majors.

In our conversation with Steve Pfaff, director of the CWES, he underscored the importance of Germanics in the success of this center. In addition to the courses that Germanics offers, its outreach by way of several public lecture series supports CWES' profile when it reapplies for federal dollars. Moreover, CWES offers German graduate students FLAS scholarships and, if the department submits to and passes certification from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), CWES can write into their grants more TAs for German graduate students.

### **Graduate Program**

There is a strong consensus among both faculty and graduate students that the Germanics graduate program is thriving. In addition to the excellence and productivity of the faculty, members of the department attributed this to a strong sense of community. In this respect our outside reviewers noted that the University of Washington has avoided the divisiveness that has plagued a number of prominent Germanics graduate programs in recent years. Moreover, the faculty offers mentorship at each stage of the program. For instance, Prof. Jane Brown directs a very successful dissertation colloquium, as a teaching overload. Also, Germanics has played a central role in the organization of the annual graduate student conference in comparative literature that is held on campus each Spring.

A separate time was set aside for the graduate students to meet with the committee. We were all struck by the fact that well over 20 students came and that they had clearly thought and talked about their mutual concerns beforehand. Their admiration for the

faculty and comfort within the program were apparent in the students' self-confidence in offering constructive criticism within a highly supportive framework.

The students told us that what drew them to the program is its broad array of offerings that include literary studies, intellectual history, literary theory, and cultural studies. The department also covers a wide range of historical periods, with the exception of the Middle Ages, since their Medievalist left some years ago and was never replaced. Another incentive is provided by the Kade Fellowship Program, which, in conjunction with Graduate School Top Scholar awards, allows them to offer \$20,000 packages to 2-3 incoming students per year; this is one of the strongest packages offered to incoming graduate students in the Humanities at the UW. What would appear to be the greatest strength is the faculty's distinction as excellent scholars, teachers and mentors. The outside evaluators underscored again and again that their work is nationally and internationally respected and puts them among the top ten departments in the country. Graduate Program Coordinator (GPC) Rick Gray stated that they are successful in competing for students with Indiana, Berkeley, Virginia, Chicago, Cornell, Yale and NYU. Other programmatic plusses mentioned by the graduate students are its open atmosphere and accessible faculty, its high rank and reputation, its study abroad possibilities, its interdisciplinarity, and its location in a major West-coast city.

With regard to the time to degree, at 7.5 years it is not unusual for Humanities programs on campus. (This does not mean, however, that the time could not ideally be shortened somewhat.) Unlike other departments on campus, Germanics has a high rate of attrition at the M.A. level. According to the GPC, as many as 20-25% are denied permission to proceed. The department may want to consider whether this denial rate is ideal. In addition, we were told that some students choose to leave for personal reasons or are hired by the high tech industry.

Because of the reduced size of the faculty, made even smaller when professors are on leave, students mentioned that they needed to turn to each other in the absence of sufficient faculty mentors. While guidelines and policies can easily be clarified by better communication, the issue of faculty availability is more significant. The department might even be said to be the victim of its own success: its faculty are meritorious and likely to earn fellowships and other awards that lead to time off from teaching responsibilities. Where possible, however, the chair might try to stagger faculty leaves better to allow for broader coverage of graduate student committees and mentoring.

The graduate students mentioned other issues that they felt merited the committee's attention.

- The department has two active foreign study opportunities: one, pre-MA, sends students to Münster to teach English while improving their German and the other, post-MA, sends students to Berlin for research. The students would like to have greater clarity about the criteria used in selecting students to participate in these exchanges.

- Not surprisingly, they would like to have more opportunities to teach literature courses, in addition to introductory and intermediate German language courses. However, we understand that such opportunities are necessarily limited by the size of the curriculum.
- Graduate students have experienced some difficulty getting enough different graduate courses. Faculty might keep in mind the need to offer different graduate courses strategically, for instance alternating among three or four graduate seminar topics, to avoid too much overlap.
- They would like to have more discussion with faculty about non-academic career paths and would like to sense greater support for such careers within the department. In light of the limited academic job market, we encourage the department to honor this request and help their students prepare for alternative careers, as well as the traditional academic ones.
- Students whose first language is neither English nor German feel that they are at a disadvantage in the case of taking other graduate exams in modern foreign languages. In such cases, the department might want to consider relaxing its requirements regarding knowledge of a third foreign language. This situation, we should add, is not unique to Germanics.

We would like to stress that all of these comments were articulated with respect and with the understanding that the department was open to hearing ways of improving the graduate program. All of us on the committee left this meeting with the sense that we were in the presence of a dynamic and vital academic community.

In addition to the positive atmosphere we observed among faculty and graduate students, it is clear not only that students are graduating with MAs and PhDs, but that a fair number of the latter are finding positions at institutions of higher learning. For example, of the nine PhDs who have graduated in academic years 2007-08, six have academic positions, while the other three have personal commitments in the Seattle area that have restricted their job search. Since 1975, 33 of their PhDs have landed academic positions in colleges and universities both in America and in Germany.

#### Faculty

Based on their assessment of faculty productivity and the strong sense of community among the graduate students, the two outside evaluators are confident that the Germanics graduate program is among the top ten in the nation; they were especially impressed with the fact that every member of the faculty contributes by way of teaching and research and everyone appreciates their colleagues' contributions. Our interview of the faculty largely substantiated this view, as well as the faculty's strong consensus that Sabine Wilke has provided strong leadership for the department, but also included several issues that merit attention, particularly as regards the undergraduate program.

- Most of the faculty we interviewed spoke at length about the graduate program and had little to say about the undergraduates. This may be indicative of an imbalance in faculty attention to the two programs that the department may want to address.
- Where faculty opinion diverged most was in departmental needs. Some argue strongly that the next hire should be an expert in applied linguistics and pedagogy to take over Manfred Bansleben's position; others feel that a new Assistant Professor outside of pedagogy would serve departmental needs better. Some want to see the continuation of the communicative approach in the language courses, while others would prefer a return to a stronger emphasis on grammar and vocabulary. These faculty felt that the students' skills at reading and analyzing literature has declined significantly, as has their knowledge of German history and culture. Given the likely retirement of the department's Romanticist at some point in the future, all agree that this area should be represented in the department. After that, however, there is disagreement as to whether departmental interests will be best served by a Medievalist or someone in modern/contemporary German. The conflict between close reading of literary texts and cultural studies came up on several occasions.
- While some faculty expressed understandable concerns about the need for more time for research, particularly as they look ahead to a shrinking staff, others realized that the number of faculty on leave effectively resulted in their being a different teaching staff from year to year. Conversation about a thoughtful and strategic leave policy is highly recommended.
- The study of German language, literature, and culture remains central to the mission of the liberal arts, but for reasons external to the university (globalization, weakening of the Transatlantic Alliance, shift to Pacific Rim relations), this role is diminished. The department needs the administration to confirm its commitment to supporting the University's excellent undergraduate and graduate education in German studies.

### **Staff**

The staff includes a full-time professional administrator (100%), Heidi Tilghman, and two classified staff members, Kate Howe (Graduate Program Specialist, 100%) who helps with departmental visitors and does informal graduate student advising, and Stephanie Welch (Undergraduate Program Specialist, 50%) who is also the department web master, produces flyers, and works with faculty on editing videos. Tilghman, who received her PhD from this department and left a tenured appointment at another university to return to the University of Washington, also teaches the occasional course for the department.

We held two separate meetings with the staff: the first with the classified staff and the second with the departmental administrator. In both meetings, it was clear to us that the



staff are dedicated to the well being of the unit. Welch, in addition to her other duties, oversees the impressive website and happily so; some of the graduate students attribute their choice of the UW Germanics graduate program to Howe's recruitment efforts. For her part, Tilghman's graduate training in the field enables her to provide a greater depth of student mentoring than would be the case with many advisors.

On the other hand, the classified staff indicated that they sometimes feel underutilized and that they would like to participate in a broader range of activities drawing on more of their skills. One way of tapping their time and talent more effectively might be in having them provide greater tactical assistance to the undergraduate advisor in the area of paperwork and the sorts of advice that do not require faculty time and expertise (graduation audits, course prerequisites, etc.); we had the sense that the faculty undergraduate advisor takes on much of this work. They also expressed the concern that the department's very active involvement in development may be detracting somewhat from their attention to the undergraduate program.

In general, the staff is remarkably supportive of the departmental mission.

### **Recommendations**

The members of the review committee all left the interviews with the strong impression that Department of Germanics is a topnotch unit. Their language program is strong and attracts students from all over campus who often choose to proceed to advanced courses. The undergraduate program has a respectable number of majors despite a nationwide drop in students who choose to major in German. The graduate students are completing the challenging MA and PhD programs, with many of the MAs finding employment in major corporations and with most of the PhDs securing academic positions. The department is well connected across campus, teaching in CHID, CWES, Comparative Literature, and participating in the Ph.D. certificate program in Theory and Criticism. We unanimously and enthusiastically recommend that that the department be commended for its work, that it be continued and supported, and that it be reviewed again in ten years.

Before committing to hiring an Assistant Professor whose main work would be in the scholarship of pedagogy and whose primary contribution to the department would be the oversight of the language program, we recommend that they take into account that they will have to run their programs with a smaller faculty given the fiscal crisis. This recommendation would apply to whenever the next position becomes available; because of the current fiscal crisis, it appears that their current job search may be postponed.

We applaud the department's efforts to forge stronger connections between language learning and critical thinking and urge it to promote research among undergraduates through such vehicles as the Mary Gates Research Scholarship and the annual undergraduate research symposium.

In order to expand the number of TAs they currently have or at least suffer less attrition due to the fiscal crisis, we recommend that the department consider certification

through ACTFL and that they work closely with CWES to take full advantage of opportunities available in the next funding cycle.

In order to make sure that there is an adequate number of faculty at any given time, we recommend that the chair more effectively stagger sabbaticals and research leaves.

As mentioned, the faculty have created a healthy and productive atmosphere in the department and work together amiably, and yet the fault line dividing old and new schools of thought is still present, albeit in muted form. The amalgamation of the two tracks—language and literature and cultural studies—provides an excellent opportunity for engaging in what can be an invigorating conversation that finds common grounds between both sides.

The current number of tenure-track faculty in the department, 7.5, is insufficient. While we recognize that the University will be severely limited over the coming years by the current budget crisis, we urge you to do everything in your power to maintain the size of, and eventually rebuild, the Germanics faculty. This department has long been a source of pride for the College of Arts and Sciences and for the University, and we trust that you will make a strong commitment to restore the department faculty to its earlier size and help it continue to thrive.