German Studies

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I. Introduction

The Department of German draws upon the expertise of the German faculty at both Bryn Mawr and Haverford Colleges to offer a broadly conceived German Studies program, incorporating a variety of courses and major options. The purpose of the major in German is to lay the foundation for a critical understanding of German culture in its contemporary international context and its larger political, social, and intellectual history. To this end, we encourage a thorough and comparative study of the German language and culture through its linguistic and literary history, institutions, political systems, and arts and sciences.

Course offerings are intended to serve both students with particular interests in German literature and literary theory and criticism and those interested in studying German and German-speaking cultures from the perspective of history, history of ideas, history of art and architecture, history of religion, linguistics, mass media, philosophy, politics, urban anthropology, and folklore.

A thorough knowledge of German is a common goal for both major concentrations. The objective of our language instruction is to teach students communicative skills that would enable them to function effectively in authentic conditions of language use and to speak and write in idiomatic German. Many German majors are encouraged to take courses in interdisciplinary areas, such as Comparative Literature, History, Political Science, Philosophy, Music, and Feminist and Gender Studies.

II. Majoring and minoring in German Studies

The German major consists of ten units. All courses at the 200 or 300 level count toward the major requirements, either in a literature concentration or in a German Studies concentration.

A. A literature concentration normally follows the sequence 201 and/or 202; 205 or 206, or 214, 215; plus additional courses to complete the ten units, two of them at the 300 level; and finally one semester of Senior Conference.

B. A German Studies major normally includes 223 and/or 224; one 200 and one 300 level course in German literature; three courses (at least one should be a 300 level course) in subjects central to aspects of German culture, history, or politics; and one semester of German 321 (Advanced Topics in German Cultural Studies).

Students majoring in German are encouraged to study at one semester in their junior year in German-speaking countries.

C. A minor in German and German Studies consists of six units of work. To earn a minor, students are normally required to take German 201 or 202, five additional units covering a reasonable range of study topics, of which at least one unit is at the 300 level. One upper-level course may be chosen with the approval of the department from the recommended electives for German Studies majors.
III. Placement guidelines for future students of German Studies

All first-year students who wish to study German are required to take the placement test prior to enrolling in a German class. All first-year (and sophomore) students will be automatically enrolled in the test and may access it as a course in Moodle. Links are available on the First Year Blog maintained by the Dean’s Office. Note: Access to the online placement test will end on Thursday, August 27, at 11:00 am. Students and advisors will be informed about placements by Thursday afternoon. After carefully considering the test results, students will be placed in one of the following categories:

- Elementary German (Germ 001/002)
- Intermediate German (Germ 101/102)
- Advanced German (Germ 201/202)
- Upper Level (any 200- or 300-level course)

IV. Course Offerings 2015-2016:

001, 002. Elementary German

Meets five hours a week with the individual class instructor, one hour with student drill instructor. Strong emphasis on communicative competence both in spoken and written German in a larger cultural context. This is a year-long course; both semesters are required for credit. (Henkel, Kenosian)

101, 102. Intermediate German

Meets three hours a week with the individual class instructor, one hour with student drill instructor. Thorough review of grammar, exercises in composition and conversation. Enforcement of correct grammatical patterns and idiomatic use of language. Study of selected literary and cultural texts and films from German-speaking countries. Two semesters. (Brust, Seyhan)


Meets three hours a week with the individual class instructor. This course is intended for students who wish to refine their speaking, writing, and reading skills beyond the intermediate level. Designed as a comprehensive introduction to modern German culture, we will discuss a variety of literary, political, and philosophical texts, including feature films and video materials. In addition, students have the opportunity to enrich the curriculum, by giving class reports on current events of their choice. Weekly grammar reviews will complement these activities. (Henkel, Seyhan)

262 Post-Wall German Film

This course provides a brief introduction to film studies and explores in particular post-wall German film. We will investigate how the selected films represent ideas of the nation visually, and how they aim to create or deconstruct certain myths of the German nation. Furthermore, this course will scrutinize in what ways the films depict issues of gender and race as part of the German national narrative struggle. In conclusion, we will focus on the role of memory within the national consciousness, and how certain post-wall German films fit within the heated discussion about a normalization of German history, which the reunification entailed. (Taught in English with an extra session in German.) (Brust)
One of the most interesting and exciting aspects of contemporary German-speaking literature is its aesthetic diversity, which eludes any clear-cut literary-historical definition. Instead, we are confronted with the co-existence of multiple aesthetic models, including documentary, feminist, meta-fictional, autobiographical, and immigrant literatures -- compelling evidence that the notion of a single German literature has become totally obsolete. The course is designed to reflect this aesthetic plurality that has shaped German-speaking culture over the past several decades. Focusing on exemplary texts, the seminar will closely examine the diverging literary concepts and writing practices, characteristic of the literary scene today. Readings include texts and films by Kehlmann, Hubert Fichte, Weiss, Kirchhoff, Judith Herrmann, Haneke, Jelinek, Handke, Wenders, Sebald, Ledig, Timm, Ransmayr, Herta Müller, and Ingo Schulze. (Henkel)

215. Survey of German Literature

This course serves as an introduction to the history and analysis of German-language literature from around 1770 to the present. Covering a cross-section of key authors and movements, students will develop an understanding of literary works in relation to their historical contexts, while sharpening abilities in the analysis and interpretation of poetry, prose, and drama. We will focus on short texts by writers like Goethe, Tieck, Heine, Büchner, Stifter, Kafka, Benn, Brecht, Bachmann, and Bernhard, and also explore interrelations between literature and other art forms such as music and painting. Students will improve their language skills through close readings, in-class presentations, and short essays. Texts and discussions in German. (Bruat)

320. Science as Fiction (in English)

How does scientific knowledge inform and influence literature? How do scientific texts make use of literary strategies and rhetorical devices in order to produce and disseminate new knowledge? Bringing together primary texts from the history of science with key literary works from Goethe to cyberpunk, this seminar will introduce students to the interdisciplinary study of relations between science and literature. Despite disciplinary divisions, literature and the sciences converge strikingly in terms of their shared objects of inquiry, theoretical assumptions, and representational strategies. We will investigate how foundational concepts in the fields of chemistry, biology, physics, psychology, and cybernetics have profoundly shaped modern fiction. While taking seriously scientific claims of truth and objectivity, we will also discuss how scientists have historically drawn on the resource of fiction as a form of knowing and communicating. Primary texts will include works by Goethe, Mary Shelley, Poe, Mesmer, Darwin, Zola, Bram Stoker, Ernst Mach, Musil, Kafka, Einstein, Calvino, Norbert Wiener, Pynchon, and William Gibson. (Henkel)

321. German Colonialism and World War I

This course will provide a historical overview of German colonial history in Africa, and critically engage with its origins, processes, and outcomes. We will first scrutinize colonial efforts by individual German states before the first unification of Germany in 1871, and then investigate the colonialism of Imperial Germany. In particular, we will focus on the time after the 1884/1885 Berlin Conference that sought to regulate the so-called “Scramble for Africa” and explore how the First World War was related to Germany’s colonial ambitions. Moreover, we will engage with the parallel development of
the German national and colonial project and the Social Darwinist thinking that influenced and contributed to the racialization of German national identity. (Brust)

399. Senior Conference (Schönherr/ Henkel/ Brust)

Please direct further questions to Ulrich Schönherr at Haverford College; e-mail: uschoenh@haverford.edu, or Azade Seyhan at Bryn Mawr College; e-mail: aseyhan@brynmawr.edu