

Department Retreat Form

Department/Program: German Studies

Chair/Director: Joe McVeigh

Retreat Date(s):

Pre-Retreat Meetings: The German Studies Department began extensive discussions of curricular revisions last fall in September and October; this included a pre-retreat series of meetings within the department as well as a meeting with members of the Engineering Department in September 2007.

Formal Retreat: May 19th and 22nd

Departmental faculty in attendance:

September 2007 Meeting with Engineering:

Gertraud Gutzmann, Chair
Joe McVeigh

September/October Curricular Meetings:

Gertraud Gutzmann, Chair
Joe McVeigh
Jocelyne Kolb (by telephone)
Judith Keyler-Mayer
Joel Westerdale

Formal Retreat on May 19th and 22nd:

Joe McVeigh, Chair
Jocelyne Kolb (by telephone)
Judith Keyler-Mayer
Joel Westerdale

Outside guest(s)/speaker(s) in attendance:

Margaret Zelljadt, Senior Class Dean
(September/October curricular meetings and retreat in May)

Susannah Howe (at our September meeting with Engineering)

Judith Cardell (at our September meeting with Engineering)

Goals for the retreat:

Throughout the 2007 – 2008 academic year the German Studies Department has been redesigning its major and its curriculum to position it at the forefront of German Studies pedagogy and scholarship. The goals for the May retreat were

- to review the many extensive changes the department had implemented on the basis of its curricular meetings in September and October 2007
- to determine how we can best integrate Smith's "Design for Learning" into our new major and curriculum
- to determine how best to maintain the department's current momentum and maximize efficacy in the face of diminishing resources

Outcomes:

The German Studies Department has developed a unified vision for an integrated departmental curriculum that fosters greater intra- and inter-departmental collaborations:

- intra-departmental: more collaboration among instructors within the department at all levels; a clearer sense of sequence within the major
- inter-departmental: offering more NEXUS courses (see attached Action Plan), proposing more Presidential and First-Year Seminars (see attached Action Plan)
- as part of both types of collaborations, we have identified ways to integrate student research more effectively into our curricular sequence

Plan to achieve outcomes:

- (See attached Action Plan)

How do your plans advance departmental goals as outlined in the mid-term or decennial reports?

Since the decennial report in 2001 our department has undergone considerable change with the loss of three senior positions, two to retirement (Hans Vaegt, Gertraud Gutzmann) and one to the administration (Margaret Zelljadt). We are currently awaiting the decision on our most recent staffing request for a tenure-track position. Despite these changes, we have fulfilled the recommendations of the decennial review, as outlined in our midterm review (2006), and embarked this past year on a major revision of our departmental curriculum in order to better reflect the current state of the field of German Studies, the priorities of the College and the current capacities of our department.

How does the department plan to integrate the list of intellectual capacities into the major? For instance, are specific capacities such as writing, speaking or quantitative skills developed in particular courses, or a series of courses?

- Writing: This capacity remains an integral part of our curriculum in both German and English. In the Fall of 2008 we will be offering the writing intensive course FYS 156. We plan to systematically develop writing skills in our curriculum with an eye toward students writing an Honors Thesis, when appropriate.
- Information Literacy: The German Studies Department produced an information literacy document in 2006, outlining a program that has already been integrated across our curriculum. Beginning this fall (2008) information literacy will be a special focus of our 100-level courses (GER 160, 170, 190) where methodology is first introduced.
- Quantitative Capacities: The department has revised its curriculum for 200-level courses (some taught in English, some in German) to add a significant focus on quantitative skills, while introducing some quantitative elements into many of its other courses as well.
- Public speaking: This capacity is currently an integral part of our curriculum in both German and English throughout all levels of courses, although more formal at the higher (200 and 300) levels.

Of the specific curricular goals identified by the faculty, which would be furthered within the major? (see page 8 of the Smith catalog for further examples)

- **Develop the ability to think critically and analytically and to convey knowledge and understanding**

Our departmental curriculum has as its central focus the ability to read closely, speak articulately and write clearly. Our new major, with its added emphasis on research skills, significantly increases emphasis on evaluating evidence and presenting it accurately, as well as working independently and collaboratively. Although scientific reasoning is less practical when dealing with works of culture, our new 200-level course with a focus on quantitative elements will teach scientific reasoning as one of the basic capacities needed for the course.

- **Develop historical and comparative perspectives**

German Studies doesn't just teach the German language; it explores the cultures conveyed in that language across disciplinary boundaries, including all aspects of the intellectual history of German-speaking Europe. Investigating the familiar and the foreign in this foreign culture can't help but demand the development of historical and comparative perspectives. We have instituted such comparative approaches through the

introduction of several new rubrics: GER 238: *Media Studies in German-Speaking Europe*, GER 248: *The Culture of Science in German-Speaking Europe* and, pending approval by CAP, GER 258: *Branding Germany. The Culture of Business in German-Speaking Europe*.

- **Become an informed global citizen**

The study of German language and its culture has long aimed to produce an informed global citizen. This goal is an integral part of our curriculum. But we do not limit it to conventional understandings of “German” culture. Within the societies of German-speaking Europe significant minority communities have developed since the 1960s and these changes provide us the opportunity to teach students about issues of diversity and tolerance. This past spring, for instance, we offered a seminar on the changing face of Germany since the 1960s, which examined the rise of the Turkish and Muslim presence in German society. Such demographic changes raise issues of co-existence and tolerance in multicultural societies which affect much of the Western world today, but they do so in a manner different from that in the U.S., providing new perspectives on common concerns. Similarly, the changing relationship between Germans and Jews over the last century still informs the public discourse in German-speaking lands on issues of migration and assimilation.

Additionally, German Studies is well positioned to assist students in understanding environmental challenges of today, as Germany is among the world leaders in addressing such challenges. Our new course in Environmental Studies, offered as part of our JYA Program in Hamburg, offers students an opportunity to experience and learn first-hand about Germany’s leading role in this area.

Has the department integrated the development of student research abilities in the structure of the major? For instance, is there an information literacy program in place for students who major in the department? Is there a research methods course recommended for your majors (either in your department or another one)? If so, when in the student’s career does she take this course?

From the elementary level of our curriculum (GER 110, GER 160) to our capstone seminars, students follow a clearly defined “information literacy” program that develops in tandem with their skills as researchers. Already in our elementary and intermediate language instruction, students learn to become information-literate in order to navigate the cultural component of these courses. Our 100-level courses in English (GER 160, 170, 190) introduce students to the methodology of our field, while challenging them to hone their researching skills as independent scholars. For instance, our new First-Year Seminar (FYS 156) will have students conduct truly independent research on the American print media of the last century to identify markers of “German-ness”, a task for which there are no textbooks nor any studies (we must establish the parameters ourselves). Our 200-level courses seek to move students to higher levels of research competency. Our capstone seminars (GER 341 and 351) and the Honors Thesis provide students the opportunity to further refine and demonstrate their investigative abilities, utilizing both

German- and English-language resources to produce advanced research papers both in German and in English.

Are the pathways through the major clear for prospective majors? Is the department satisfied with the level of advanced work accomplished by its majors? (It may be useful to review the transcripts of graduating majors, or to examine the course-taking patterns of several recent groups of senior majors.)

- With the revision of the German Studies curriculum over the past academic year the pathways through the major should now be clear for prospective majors. There will be some additional fine-tuning presented to CAP this coming fall.
- Although many of our German Studies students go on to win post-graduate fellowships, there is more that can be done to raise the overall level of advanced work by our majors. Our new curriculum –with its German- and English-language capstone components-- places more emphasis on research skills and other capacities that will serve our students well both before and after graduation. As a result of this increased emphasis we hope to raise the number of our students writing an Honors Thesis, doing independent research work in the capstone seminars, and successfully applying for fellowships.

What are the culminating or capstone experiences for students in your major?

German Studies has a binary capstone: one seminar focusing on linguistic capacities in German (GER 341) and one, taught in English, with a special emphasis on research (GER 351).

Ideally, students taking these seminars (both required of majors) will have spent some time studying in Germany, where the emphasis on independent research is a central element of the academic experience.

The capstone seminars are designed to allow students to utilize the full breadth of the skills they have acquired while studying here at Smith. Building on these capacities, these seminars will prepare students to function as articulate and informed scholars, be it in graduate school, in the workplace, or as the recipient of a postgraduate fellowship.

Please attach a summary of any proposed changes to be considered by the department and any associated timeline for changes to be submitted to CAP

CAP has already received and approved our new major and the first phase of changes in our curriculum (including a new type of course, the NEXUS course –GER 298--, as well as other new courses, such as GER 248: *The Culture of Science in German-Speaking Europe* and a new FYS). In 2008-2009 we will be submitting further innovations to our curriculum, including a Presidential Seminar, additional NEXUS courses and collaborative courses with the natural and social sciences.

The German Studies Department has developed a program that is cutting edge in the field –one that truly makes the most of the liberal arts college environment by reaching out across the curriculum and by fully integrating its own language and culture components. Unfortunately, that advantage will be gravely compromised if the department is not granted the tenure-track position requested this year.

Attachment: German Studies Action Plan 2008-2009