

Creating Flexible, Self-Motivated Language and Culture Learners: Intentional Integration in the Third-Year German Curriculum

Lynn Wolff, Johanna Schuster-Craig, Elizabeth Mittmann, Matt Handelman

I. Project Description

Our team project was designed to begin a longer process of curricular redesign at the 300-level for the German program at MSU. Our primary aims for this project were:

- to move away from textbook-driven content and instead move to topic-based courses
- to create a curriculum designed to produce flexible and self-motivated language learners
- to help us develop a repetitive structure of certain linguistic and communicative tasks which we could use across courses and which would be highly adaptive to new topics
- to create concrete, task-based learning environments which cohere across the 300-level, and equip students with language and critical-thinking tools to become independent language learners who can move successfully into 400-level classes or other language-intensive engagements (study abroad, internships).

II. Project Outcomes and Transferability

This project allowed us to begin to design four new syllabi for courses that will be implemented over the course of the 2017 – 2018 school year. Our outcomes included:

- topics courses for the 300-level on the themes of Germany and its others, Germans in nature, German body culture, and German genders;
- 4 sample units for these respective courses which build upon scaffolded grammar tasks and encourage adaptation along these themes;
- the engagement of an outside consultant to evaluate our unit designs, with the hope of applying these comments across courses and aiding in the long-term development of pilotable courses;
- a plan for implementing one pilot course in the fall of 2017 (Germany and its Others); followed by two pilot courses to be introduced in the spring 2018 (Germans and Nature and German Genders); followed by the fourth pilot course to be introduced in the fall of 2018 (German Body Culture)

As for the notion of transferability, these individual units have been very helpful for sparking conversations amongst faculty members and have wide applicability within our own program across the upper-level curriculum. If this topics model is successful, we would be happy to discuss this kind of teaching with other language programs that may also be looking to revise their curriculum at MSU.

III. Project Impact

The primary impact of this fellowship at the program level has been the incorporation of new faculty hired over the past four years to participate in shaping a vision for the German undergraduate curriculum.

The terms of the fellowship, which allowed us to come together through CeLTA and present our project twice to different stakeholders at MSU, prompted us to think in new ways about the process of building curriculum. As a result, we decided to seek out evaluators for the work that we usually do in a vacuum. Through the outreach events at CeLTA we received quite useful feedback, especially from colleagues in CeLTA, the English Language Center and SLS. This feedback has helped us shape our program and evaluate whether or not the units we proposed will produce the desired effect. Funding from the fellowship also allowed us to hire a consultant outside of the German program at MSU to evaluate our materials and their goals. This step is usually absent from new curricular design, and we are excited to respond to this expert feedback as we begin to “test drive” these topics courses beginning in the fall semester of 2017.