

0843-1

Summary of the Session
"The Future of German in American Education"
MLA, Chicago
December 29, 1995

In a 75-minute session at the 1995 MLA convention in Chicago a group of Germanists, primarily from colleges and universities, continued the discussion on the future of German in American education. Most participants had previously received the summary of the Anaheim forum. While the issues discussed echoed those raised in Anaheim, special attention was devoted to the following topics:

1. Outreach and Student Recruitment

Dramatic drops in enrollments and the loss of entire programs at all levels make student recruitment a top priority. Possible approaches for increasing enrollments

- at the secondary level

publicity efforts

convince administrators of the need for more languages, not primarily (or exclusively) Spanish

publish in non-language professional journals (e.g., *Educational Leadership*), make presentations at conferences attended by administrators

reach counselors

foster school and community activities: German day, immersion weekends

teacher development

support teachers who are interested in broadening their expertise base (e.g., German teacher as the assessment specialist, the technology expert, collaborating with the science or social science teacher)

build collaboratives between HSs and colleges (outreach committee; outreach days)

administrative changes

be alert to changes as a result of block-scheduling

- at the post-secondary level

administrative efforts

become thoroughly familiar with institutional practices and procedures that can help or hinder enrollments: e.g., work with admissions office to reach

incoming students who have placed out of the language requirement;

consider placement and credit rules (e.g., "retro-credit"); put strongest teachers in second year courses to encourage third year enrollments;

address enrollment minima and cost-intensiveness of language instruction with faculty assignments in language courses (enrollment averaging);

curricular changes

contribute to the core curriculum, teaching "German" topics in English; reach students in "overflow" departments (e.g., history, English; -- concern about turf wars); see also below

2. Curricular Changes

- Critical for the future of Germanistik in the United States are strong departments; they
- build and support an intellectual presence by the department within the institution, among other things by creating programs that have an encompassing intellectual focus;
 - integrate language and culture from the beginning through graduate courses;
 - establish linkages with other disciplines;
 - offer the highest quality programs which consider the changed student body;
 - make graduate students aware of the centrality of German teaching in their professional preparation and future careers.

Given the fact that many colleges and universities will in the future teach even fewer students who have previously been instructed in German it is all the more imperative that our curricula be revamped. We must devise totally reconceptualized courses, curricula, and materials for two major categories of learners:

- those with previous exposure to German; and
- beginning learners.

Neither group is currently well attended to.

An issue that has been mentioned repeatedly is that, as we try to reach other students with ever more diverse courses and curricula, we might lose the German language as one of our defining foci. Several colleagues raised concerns about the German language abilities of all our students, undergraduate majors as well as graduate students.

Our interest in reaching American students may require us to plan deliberately and carefully for study abroad opportunities for undergraduate as well as graduate students.

3. Articulation between All Instructional Levels

Although the discussion about attracting and retaining students for the study of German dealt primarily with diverse outreach activities, such efforts can ultimately be successful only if the profession dedicates itself seriously to addressing articulation between major instructional levels.

4. Governance and Structures

Increasingly, institutions are restructuring their "language departments," a trend that is best exemplified in the appearance of language centers. These deserve particularly close scrutiny since, depending on the institutional setting, they can be everything from a very favorable environment that could truly support the goals of a cultural studies program with a high level of language competence, all the way to thinly disguised moves to close entire language programs.

5. Use of Technological Innovations (e.g., WWW with home-pages about a whole range of topics, internet, list-serves, discussion groups, syllabus and materials sharing) Since much of what is being discussed requires cooperation and collaboration (within institutions, regionally, nationally, and internationally), and shared information that must be readily accessible and up-to-date we may need to allocate resources to administering and coordinating such efforts. (With proper direction, perhaps paid graduate students could be put in charge of this national effort.)