

**Summary of First Regional Forum  
"The Future of German in American Education"**

**Anaheim, CA, November 19, 1995**

In conjunction with the AATG annual meeting a full-day regional forum was conducted to begin a focused exploration of the underlying issues facing Germanistik in the United States, to start determining priorities, and to begin to create a consensus about actionable recommendations for dealing with these issues.

**I. Procedure**

The event was structured in the following fashion: an invitational central portion, attended by approximately 20 colleagues from all levels of instruction, was flanked by two open fora which were very well attended by other conference participants. For the invitational portion, five presenters had been asked ahead of time to provide a succinct statement on the following topics:

- the view from the professional organization,
- the undergraduate view,
- the graduate view,
- teacher education,
- the articulated program, K-16.

The floor was then opened to input from the participants. At the end of each session and at the end of the whole day priorities as well as possible solutions were identified and further input was sought.

**II. Outcome of the Deliberations**

**1. General characterization**

The day's deliberations indicated participants' sense of urgency regarding the need to consider a different emphasis for the content as well as the delivery system of Germanistik in the United States. Key obstacles were identified and possible specific actions were recommended.

**This general assessment, clearly embedded in considerations that pertain to all educational efforts regardless of level, reflects increased concern about**

- all students' access to educational opportunities;
- student performance or learning outcomes and the assessment of such performance;
- accountability vis-a-vis diverse constituencies (e.g., local, state, national legislative and fiscal units; institutions and their varied constituencies; demands by the American public);
- a potential redefinition of the role of education in the current social, demographic, and economic environment;

- shifting perceptions about the location of the major responsibility for educational policy making and for financial responsibility (state, local, and individual as contrasted with federal initiatives and directives), whose effect is heightened by different funding priorities;
- the impact of an increasingly knowledge-based information society and the particular place technology in general and media in particular occupy in this society;
- changing understandings regarding the nature and status of certain kinds of knowledge; and, finally,
- the role of learners in the kind of learning that is deemed to be crucial for responsible and rewarding citizenship in an American democracy in the twenty-first century.

**For the field of Germanistik** this general characterization is sharpened by the following developments and their consequences:

- massive demographic changes that favor certain languages, both nationally and regionally  
⇒ German is increasingly becoming a college-level subject only;
- a change in the make-up of the profession (less and less an immigrant group)  
⇒ redefinition of Germanistik and the role of canons and largely continental approaches to content and faculty priorities, particularly at the college level;
- demands on teachers made by communicatively oriented language instruction  
⇒ need for continued in-service work and faculty development, with regard to language ability, curriculum construction, and pedagogy, where the collegiate reward system is not focused on service and teaching, therefore provides few incentives for change;
- closing of programs at all levels of instruction, sometimes due to low enrollments, sometimes due to demand (and fiscal consequences) for other language programs  
⇒ tightness in the academic job market, leading to lack of interest in an academic career, irrespective of educational level;
- increasing pre-professionalization of college curricula ⇒ curricular prescriptiveness that leaves less and less room for electives; drop in language requirements;
- reduced usefulness of German ( in light of other demographic and economic realities and the increasing dominance of English in many academic disciplines) and perceived difficulty of German;
- but also increased demands from colleagues, programs, disciplines across institution  
⇒ inability to meet these demands easily and competently (e.g., insufficient breadth of general knowledge about the cultural area and within the disciplines on the part of faculty; limited support in terms of materials and awareness of pedagogy for advanced and professional level use of German; therefore continued preference for a grammatically driven, formal mastery-focused approach that is primarily based on and limited to experience in the introductory and intermediate classroom).

## 2. Proposed content shift

As for the desired content shift, the group identified the following points:

- **constructing curriculum** that provides a long-term, continuous, well-motivated sequence of instruction that is based on second language acquisition research and knowledge of second language learning, thereby enhancing learners' likelihood of attaining a high level of competence in German (vertical articulation);

- **replacing a primarily additive model of language learning** (e.g., first mastery of the formal inventory of German, then content knowledge, then culture, then literature, then access to professional subfields; first oral then literate use of the language) **with a holistic model** that integrates linguistic and cultural knowledge right from the beginning in a fashion that is appropriate to the educational level/age of the learner;

- **building a curriculum and developing materials from the bottom up**, rather than with conceptual and programmatic priority being accorded to collegiate instruction;

- **constructing curricula and developing materials on at least two major tracks:**  
a) pre-collegiate instruction with the potential for articulated collegiate instruction; b) collegiate instruction only.

- **attending to explicit linkage across the curriculum/disciplines** (horizontal articulation).

## 3. Issues pertaining to the delivery system

With regard to the delivery system, it was the group's sense that we must leave behind a separatist model, where each instructional level largely conducts its business in isolation from, with minimal information about, and limited contact with the other levels, or even an individualistic model, where individual colleagues essentially determine their own courses of action. Not surprisingly, the potential for an individualistic approach increases with the level of instruction.

In other words, **the increasingly common term "articulation" applied here as well**, only this time with the meaning of mutually respectful and informed collaboration between the two major instructional levels, pre-collegiate and collegiate instruction, though such an approach seems called for as well between the diverse pre-collegiate levels and also between undergraduate and graduate instruction.

Colleges should no longer disregard pre-collegiate instruction just because it does not meet narrow definitions about how second language learning takes place. All learners (and not a limited subset) must be considered, along with what can be accomplished in American pre-

collegiate education. As a consequence, collegiate instruction is likely to have to undergo the more dramatic change.

**III. Special Opportunities**

The significant need for access to information and information sharing, in principle, is addressable through the enormous **capabilities of the educational electronic linkages** (e.g., internet, e-mail, WWW, CD-Rom's). Even so some form of traffic control for this information superhighway within German seems required.

**The AATG's extremely well run executive office** is able and willing to support collaboration at all levels and in diverse regions. However, even with such support leadership by individuals or small groups is nevertheless called for.

**Support through the Goethe Institute and the DAAD**, but also through other funding agencies, is particularly advantageous to the German profession, for faculty development, materials preparation, student opportunities. Further linkages to the business community, particularly for internships and exchanges, need to be made and coordinated. Likewise study abroad opportunities could benefit from better description and availability in a linked fashion.

**Diverse initiatives, such as German across the curriculum**, which enhance visibility across our schools and colleges.

**IV. Potential Obstacles**

Without reiterating the constraints that arise from the points mentioned above under "General Considerations," other key obstacles are connected to

- **the reward structure for collegiate faculty** (institution-independent knowledge creation versus institutionally moored service and teaching);
- **insufficient preparation on the part of department chairs** for their pivotal roles between individual faculty and the administration; in particular an orientation that considers the institution's mission and goals and locates all of a department's efforts within that institutional set of priorities frequently is not part of department's or individual faculty members' socialization into higher education;
- **the long-standing distinction between language and content instruction** with its repercussions in faculty status of the two groups of teachers and the separation of responsibilities of a non-connected portion of this discontinuous curriculum;
- **insufficient knowledge base for curriculum construction and pedagogy** on the part of all faculty whose education is generally particularistic and highly specialized, rather than collaborative and comprehensive and, in any case, is extremely limited with regard to advanced

language teaching and learning;

- **outmoded materials and assessment practices** which, because of the insufficiently sophisticated teacher preparation, can become *de facto* curriculum and pedagogy and limit innovation and creative initiatives;

- **the unique demands on graduate education** to attend both to the preparation of specialists in the discipline and generalists who would be able to contribute substantively in all kinds of institutions;

- **the financing of graduate education**, which is dependent on, and results in, inexperienced apprentice teachers (TA's) being charged with a large share of language instruction; institutional practice which financially privileges graduate education over undergraduate education;

- **inadequate teacher preparation models** that stem from an understanding of teacher preparation that is unconnected to the disciplines, with the attendant lower prestige of this kind of work (particularly the methods course and TA supervision); no careful planning of pre-service and in-service development;

- **the isolation of precollegiate colleagues** who often do not receive support for their professional development needs or outreach work with their students even when colleges are near-by.

- **institutional competition and restricted resources that do not automatically favor collaboration.**

**V. Recommendations for Specific Actions**

- **Institute regional collaboratives across all instructional levels**, first in areas that have well-established feeder relationships; then generalize these experiences to other places;
- **Support foreign language/German department chairs with extended department chair workshops** that give them a full understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities for leadership;
- **Create a data bank of program profiles**; a task force/working group should first develop a set of criteria that would make entries into this electronic data bank reasonably compatible; any such information should be **linked with the AATG Web site.**
- **Gather information about internship possibilities**; again, electronic linkage is most efficient and effective.
- **Develop innovative approaches to assessment**, perhaps beginning with assessment at the critical transition between pre-collegiate and collegiate instruction, followed for the major at the time of graduation; then broaden this experience to other stages (e.g., required sequence);
- **Prepare a document which lists desiderata for materials development** which would be widely disseminated to publishers and the profession; find ways to encourage authorship by pre-collegiate faculty;
- **Collect syllabi for German-focused courses which can be offered within the general education component of colleges and universities**; similarly collect syllabi for GAC

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efforts, arranged by major delivery models.

- **Encourage advocacy for articulated language learning at all levels of the educational system and with the public at large** (e.g. superintendents, high school principals and guidance counselors, parent groups and school boards; deans and high-level university administrators, colleagues in other disciplinary areas.

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