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BUSINESS GERMAN IN THE USA TODAY: KNOWING OUR STUDENTS AND COLLABORATING WITH OUR COLLEAGUES

INTRODUCTION

Business language courses are currently taught at hundreds of colleges and universities in the United States, with a diverse spectrum of different student populations and instructors. This diversity demands that a variety of up-to-date texts, materials and syllabi are readily accessible. While some business language instructors have found the ideal combination of syllabus and texts for their classes, other instructors struggle individually to come up with current and appropriate materials. There is no simple solution, nor is there one textbook or syllabus that will fill all needs. One important step toward a solution is to *know our student body*, and another part of a solution is to *collaborate to evaluate and annotate* resources and materials in such a way that anyone can find workable ideas and appropriate activities.

Business German at our university urgently required updating, and we knew that other colleagues across the country felt the same. In addition, we had noticed our students' wide range of backgrounds and potentially different expectations toward Business German classes, and we heard varying opinions about "Business German" voiced at our bi-monthly German *Stammtisch* gathering. We thought that an investigation of academic and personal backgrounds and future plans of our Business German students (German 4309 students) and German students who have not yet taken any Business German (German 2302 students)¹ could help us redesign courses. Further inspiration for this investigation came from discussions with colleagues at the CIBER Conference on Business, Language and Culture held at Park City, Utah, in April 2005.²

¹ In the rest of the article, our former Texas Tech Business German students will be identified as German 4309 students and our fourth-semester German students who have not yet taken any Business German classes will be identified as German 2302 students.

² Although German is considered a "smaller" language, our research on Business German Programs in the US showed that 37 out of 50 universities offer Business

To profile and probe the needs of students at our university, we created a questionnaire and administered it to students in an upper division Business German class from Spring 2005, and to fourth-semester German students, many of whom might be taking Business German in the future.³ We present here results of our survey and make suggestions for solutions and collaborations which we hope may appeal to colleagues across the country.

When planning any business foreign language course, the interests of at least three groups should be considered: students, who need to receive an education rich in current events and contemporary business issues; instructors, who need to be able to react to students' needs with relevant and authentic class materials; and finally, companies that want to hire employees with solid cross-cultural and communicative skills. In fact, surveys have shown that many American companies think there is a deficit of such employees who are not only trained in business, but also in intersocial and intercommunicative language skills (Borst 62).

PROFILES OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

Table 1 shows the profile of our thirty-four participants. From German 4309, 60% (6 of 10) are German majors,⁴ and overall, 90% (9 of 10) of the German 4309 students majored in Arts and Sciences. International Business was chosen as a major by 20% (2 of 10), Engineering by 20% (2 of 10), and one student was an Education major.⁵

Of the German 2302 students, 67% (16 of 24) majored in Arts and Sciences, 13% (3 of 24) Visual Performing Arts, and 8% (2 of 24) Mass Communication. International Business, Architecture, or General Studies were

German programs for undergraduate students. These numbers may justify a demand for a higher turnout of Business German representatives.

³ The full questionnaire is available at <<http://www.languages.ttu.edu/courses/germ4309/>>.

⁴ The Business German course actually had twenty-six students enrolled in Spring 2005. However, since the survey was done in the summer 2005 month after the course was completed we were unable to reach all students. The twenty-four students of German 2302 took part in this survey in class during the second summer term 2005.

⁵ The majors of the entire 4309 class, retrieved from the Texas Tech Web site, were Accounting, Economics, Electrical Engineering, Business, Biology, Restaurant and Hotel Management, English, German, Music, International Business, History, Philosophy, Mechanical Engineering, General Studies, Multidisciplinary Studies, and Biochemistry.

TABLE 1. PROFILES OF PARTICIPANTS

Profile of Participants	German 4309 (Business German = +) n=10	German 2302 (Business German = -) n=24
Male/ Female	8 male / 2 female	14 male / 10 female
Major Field of Study	German 6/10 60% Other Arts and Sciences 3/10 30% Business Administra- tion 2/10 20% Engineering 2/10 20% Education 1/10 10%	Arts and Sciences 16/24 67% Visual and Performing Arts 3/24 13% Mass Communication 2/24 8% Business Admin. 1/24 4% Architecture 1/24 4% General Studies 1/24 4%
Minor Field of Study	Arts and Sciences 6/10 60% German 3/10 30%	Arts and Sciences 16/24 67% Education 3/24 13% German 2/24 8% Visual and Performing Arts 1/24 4%
Age (mean)	20–25 8/10 80% 26–31 2/10 20%	20–25 19/24 79% 26–31 4/24 17% 32–above 1/24 4%
German heritage	7/10 70%	12/24 50%

named by one student each. German heritage was confirmed by 7 of 10 (70%) of the German 4309 students and 12 of 24 (50%) of the German 2302 students.

As expected, we had a relatively high percentage of German 4309 students who were German majors (60%). Many of the 2302 students had not decided yet whether or not they would choose a German major, but 6 out of 24 (20%)

of these students said they were interested in a German minor or major. Since German was their chosen language for a language requirement, further interest might still develop. As possible future Business German students, the thoughts and expectations of the 2302 students was of great importance to us.

It was also expected that we would find the majority of majors and minors outside the field of Business Administration. Only 20% (2 of 10) of the German 4309 students major in Business Administration (with a focus on International Business) and only 1 out of 24 (4%) German 2302 students claimed Business Administration as a major. In fact, 90% of the German 4309 students and 67% of the German 2302 students reported majors and minors in the wide umbrella of Arts and Sciences.

One reason that Business Administration students do not populate our Business German courses is that the College of Business Administration at Texas Tech independently offers country-specific business courses. Students who major in International Business with a focus on Germany and the EU must enroll in a Business German course offered by the Business Administration College. At our university there is an interest in business language in other departments, and we have begun to collaborate in the hopes of cross-listing our courses. A number of universities have already discovered this niche, and through the efforts of devoted colleagues they have developed successful collaborations between business and language programs, resulting in cross-listed courses and even new undergraduate degrees.⁶

STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES AND PERCEPTIONS

The data on our students' stated interest in German-American business relations is shown in Table 2. Business German was chosen in Spring 2005 by 9 out of 10 (90%) of the students solely from their own interest, while 5 in 10 (50%) chose it for both interest and requirement reasons. The German 2302 students were asked what kind of Business German classes they *would like* to take. A majority (75%) of the students made suggestions on topics and contents for future Business German courses, while the remaining 25% replied with answers such as "none," "not sure," or "I am not interested in Business German classes."

⁶ Visit <http://www.modlangs.gatech.edu/lbat/index.php> and <http://www.gatech.edu/profiles/cothran.php> for information on the LBAT program (Languages for Business and Technology) at the Georgia Tech School of Modern Languages.

TABLE 2. INTEREST IN GERMAN-AMERICAN BUSINESS RELATIONS

Students stated interest in German-American business relations	German 4309 (Business German = +) n= 10	German 2302 (Business German = -) n= 24
<i>Did you choose Business German classes out of your own interest or as a curriculum requirement?</i>	own interest 9/10 90% requirement 5/10 50%	N/A
<i>What kind of Business German classes would you like to take?</i>	N/A	18/24 suggestions 75% 6/24 no suggestions 25%
<i>Stated interest in German-American business relations</i>	9/10 90%	18/24 75%
<i>I am interested in working in Germany.</i>	Yes 9/10 90% No 1/10 10%	Yes 12/24 50% No 12/24 50%

Surprisingly, while 25% of the German 2302 students showed no interest in taking Business German courses, 50% of these 24 students were interested in working in Germany. This might indicate a possible misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the term “Business German.” For example, one student replied to the question about the kind of Business German classes he would like to take with: “not interested in business classes; but maybe classes on German health care.” This kind of answer is another indicator of a need for redefining Business German course content and course titles. The titles should not imply only “economics” or “management,” but rather should include many fields of work, reflecting more of the students’ majors and interests (as also seen in Table 1). Also in Table 2, although Business Administration was a major for only 3 out of 34 (8%) of the participants, 9 out of 10 (90%) German 4309 students and 18 out of 24 (75%) German 2302 students did show interest in German-American business relations.

As seen in Table 3, over 80% of both groups stated they expected Business German classes that are based on “general knowledge on Business German

and Germany” rather than “specific business information about their field of interest” (students could choose one answer or both answers). On the one hand, this confirmed that most of our students are attracted to Business German courses that focus on more general knowledge. On the other hand, these results also showed that a significant portion (30–40%) of the students expect information relating to their specific field in addition to general knowledge. In other words, more students would be satisfied with a course that integrates individual student interests *within* a more generally focused course. Such a course could accommodate individual interests by incorporating a semester-long project or portfolio for which students could choose a topic that relates to their major, their career goals, or other interests.

TABLE 3. EXPECTATIONS OF BUSINESS GERMAN CLASSES

Students' expectations of Business German classes: “What do you expect from a Business German class?”	German 4309 (Business German = +) n=10		German 2302 (Business German = -) n=24	
Answer choices:				
<i>General knowledge on Business German and Germany</i>	9/10	90%	20/24	83%
<i>Specific business information about your field of interest</i>	4/10	40%	7/24	29%

Table 4 shows the students' suggestions for topics that could be included in Business German courses. Students were also asked about their primary post-graduation plans, since students' expectations of college courses depend not only on their different academic backgrounds and their major/minor subjects, but also upon their own future interests.

TABLE 4. SUGGESTIONS AND FUTURE PLANS

	German 4309 (Business German = +) n=10	German 2302 (Business German = -) n=24
Students' suggested topics for future Business German courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • customs • political background and business regulations • business vocabulary and current events • knowledge about German business practice and culture • interest in German / Austrian / Swiss companies in US 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • money delegations to programs and the attitude of business • business culture, trade law in Germany
What kind of Business German class would you like to take?	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • comparison of Germany and other countries • Internet involvement • commerce • advertising • marketing • business relations between the US and Germany • differences between German and American companies • small business ownerships • German medical field • social situations (establishing contacts) • German law • German business law • industry and growth • labor relations • politics and economics • green development • environmental problems
Primary post graduation plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • overseas employment • graduate studies • master's degree in translation • job in teaching • internship • graduate school for MBA or IMBA • medical school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • graduate school • master's degree in German translation • law school • work abroad • military officer • optometry school • medical school • advertising • teach English to high school students • opera business

The various types of businesses and fields mentioned in post-graduation plans not only demonstrate that the term *business* can be defined broadly, but also ask for reflection on the course title “Business German.” We could instead choose titles that imply a broader look at the contemporary German professional world, such as “Professions and Business German,” “German-American Careers,” “Professional Exchange—USA and Germany,” “The US and the EU,” or “German for Professional Purposes.” If a market exists within our student body, we could even include more specific fields of interests in our course titles: “From Advertisement to Zoology: German in the Real World,” “In the Spotlight: German for Visual and Performing Arts,” or “Beyond Business: German-American Job Profiles.”

SUGGESTIONS FOR SOLUTIONS

Even for instructors who are committed to developing and offering Business German, there are often significant obstacles, which include relatively low enrollment numbers and financial restrictions. Most universities are not able to offer a wide range of Business German classes, and many are only able to offer one course per year or every other year. Ideally, if only one course is possible it should appeal to a wide range of students, utilizing a variety of authentic class materials, and it should focus upon much-needed general cognitive and cultural skills:

What sets the really good business professionals apart from the others are the generic cognitive skills, precisely the strength of liberal arts. Consequently business language should focus on the development of generic cognitive skills. (Kelm)

However, a further obstacle is that current authentic materials, which are arguably the most important teaching tool for business language, simply cannot be found in textbooks. Instructors often must invest a great deal of time creating useful and contemporary materials themselves.

SOLUTIONS

To disseminate materials, perspectives, and ideas for Business German efficiently to educators at all levels, we need collaborative solutions that truly link high schools, universities, businesses, and publishing companies. We, as teachers, have to move from making our class preparations in isolation and head toward a deeper international cooperation (Somerholter).

We could work together toward a new *German-American-Business-Network*, a Web site that is accessible to all instructors for posting and exchanging

class material. A number of wonderful Business German Web sites in the USA and Germany already exist, but many are completely independent of one another. The new Web site could be regularly updated with instructors' comments and reviews about materials and links, and it would be available to all universities and interested businesses in the United States and Germany. Companies could even post jobs with specific requests of what they expect from candidates. Links may also remind the companies of the possibility of offering onsite Business German classes for employees, by employing Business German teachers from nearby universities. Responsibility for maintaining this new Web site could rotate among willing institutions.

As mentioned already, cooperation should also take place as an interdepartmental process on campus. More universities could move from offering Business Language classes in individual departments—such as different courses in the Foreign Language and Business departments—and instead connect departments in a “Business and Foreign Language Center,” which incorporates a *mélange* of work fields and languages. Furthermore, if collaborations between departments are supported and promoted by deans and faculty across campus, then students would be much more likely to see the value of business language.

One way to promote Business German directly to students is to promote the ZDfB (*Zertifikat Deutsch für den Beruf*) examination to all levels of students in German programs, starting in the first semester. This would “plant the seed” of interest in Business German and of achieving this internationally accepted certificate. It may also be important to develop more streamlined ZDfB testing procedures. Taking the ZDfB test online and confidentially delivering the final grades online could make for much faster response time for the students and create a more economical and prompt testing process. Online testing may also more closely mimic everyday business world practices, especially the test sections on listening comprehension and on writing business correspondence.

We should also stimulate interest in Germany's economy and Business German in our elementary and high schools. High school language classes must strive to incorporate a global focus, in addition to activities on everyday situations and personal experiences:

German curriculum guides of most school districts as well as many state K–12 Foreign Language Frameworks include business German topics at various levels of instruction. Evidence shows that students along with parents show great interest in business language because they recognize the applicability. (Barbe and Langeheine 131)

The interest and motivation to learn about global issues and German-American business exists, but unfortunately, many schools are not able to offer German because of a lack of funds or teachers. To help fill this void universities can step in and offer German Outreach programs⁷ that regularly visit elementary and high schools, providing some much-needed exposure to foreign language and culture.

Our results indicated that a majority of students would consider working in Germany someday. Ultimately, it would be ideal if more students had the opportunity of an internship or work experience in Germany or with German-American businesses in the US. Although some may argue that it is solely the students' responsibility to obtain internships, Business German classes could be far more attractive if we could offer connections with internship programs in the United States and in Germany *within* the classes. Alternatively, we could offer internships to Business German students that include participation in a German Outreach Program to schools. During the semester, or in the semester following a Business German class, they could teach and introduce German-American trade relations and basic language-skills to high school students. High schools, in turn, could be invited to visit Business German classes on campus. Business German courses can also develop virtual "exchange programs" with German high schools that have their main focus on business and the economy, such as the *Wirtschaftsgymnasium* or the *Berufsschule*.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that English is a global business language, and a large international population learns English for the very purpose of global communication. Indeed, if our students' careers involve communication with German companies, they will be able to use English in many of these business dealings. However, they should be made aware that gaining basic knowledge of the language and culture of their business partners will take their business dealings to a whole new level:

Globalization has resulted in a growing need for those who in any capacity work in an international company to know and appreciate the culture of the country where the business is being conducted. In addition to knowing

⁷ See <<http://www.languages.ttu.edu/german/outreach/index.htm>> for German Outreach at TTU, and <<http://dev.laits.utexas.edu/introgerman/index.html>> for Introducing German at UT-Austin.

the language of the country, an employee needs to know how to behave, communicate, view and organize the world in the “other” language. (Van-Valkenburg 273)

Germany is not just the language of many of our ancestors but a language spoken today in almost one million jobs in the United States. German companies are responsible for creating roughly 700,000 jobs in the US, and US companies have created about the same number in Germany (“Factsheet”). It may be up to universities and high schools to help enlighten students as early as possible about the importance of European-American business relationships.

Statistics seem to indicate the continuing value of developing “Business German” in the United States. Syllabi, curricula, textbooks, and authentic class material that fulfill the needs of learners to become part of a multi-cultural and multi-lingual world of business must be available to all. We think it is worth the effort to collaborate, and to invest this time “marketing” Germany and Europe at all levels, from elementary to high schools, and to the different departments at our universities. Since career opportunities are a strong motivator for high school and college students to choose particular courses, we should try to understand our students’ future goals, which may vary widely. At our institution, we learned that there is a market, but we must consider many diverse demands when designing courses. Finally, we have to remember that we are marketers and promoters as well as instructors, and the way we present languages to our students is critical: Business German is going to be “purchased” the way we sell it.

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