

First-year German Goals

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My intent here is to stay far away from the notion of goals as enumerating, for example, “How many chapters of the book will we cover?” and even just “How much proficiency are they going to acquire.” That is because I want to connect the first-year German goals to the curricular discussions occurring in our Department and more generally in the university, state and nation.

Some foundations for this discussion, other than my long-term general experience, are: 1) recent state document about insufficiency of publisher’s textbooks; 2) Heidi Byrnes’ article about reformulating German curriculum; 3) various PSU curricular discussions; 4) content and proficiency definitions for K-12 in Oregon, especially the Portland Public Schools Pew-funded Second Language Group’s proposed curriculum; 5) the ACTFL concept of specifying function (what will they do with their learning), context (under what circumstances in real life, at least as we can emulate it in the course – and not defined just in terms of travel in Germany), and accuracy (how well will they do it? – not in terms of academic tests, but rather outcomes).

But first: What will the course do for us, beyond providing some warm-fuzzy teacher satisfaction?

Create students who are satisfied with their instruction, who want to continue, and who, after they cease taking courses, will support language programs later (for example as voters), because they: 1) have acquired a demonstrable facility in using German, and are conscious that they did it in the course; 2) understand how to make the transition to later study; 3) have been given a satisfying cultural experience; 4) have been encouraged to customize the language-learning experience to their own interests; 5) understand how knowledge of German can relate to vocations, including specifically their intended vocation, and to one of their main avocations; 6) have been treated decently as people and valued as learners of German.

But what are the target proficiency levels?

At the end of 103 the best true beginners will attain ACTFL Intermediate-Mid proficiency (speaking and writing); in terms of A-F grades: A = IM, B = IL (Intermediate-Low), C = IL in speaking or writing, Novice-High in the other; D = NH in both.

What sorts of knowledge and skills will they learn, apply and acquire?

deal with language they can’t handle directly: tolerance of ambiguity, dictionary use, translation resources (people, websites).

obtain information with rudimentary language knowledge: face-to-face inquiry and textual/library search capabilities.

find out about current pop culture and how to research German sources about a serious cultural or academic topic.

know something worthwhile about one major figure, topic, work, etc. from: music, literature, history, or some other “highbrow” cultural area (religion, philosophy, etc.).

will have looked at some significant feature of their own culture from the viewpoint of a German-speaking culture.

the technical skills needed for modern communication: special characters; basic web vocabulary (Heimseite, suchen, etc. and the TPR words “Klicken Sie auf...”).

an introductory understanding of the principles of language acquisition, such that any erroneous preconceptions they may have acquired no longer interfere with their learning.

a repertory of productive language learning skills.

know about articulation to second- and third-year German and to the major.

know how German can relate to their prospective vocation and their serious avocations.

What activities will they undertake to accomplish those goals?

The preponderance of classroom instruction will be in speaking and real-time writing, the latter, where possible, with immediate (on-the-spot) feedback. Comprehensible input will be important in the classroom and outside.

They will explore and internalize (in classroom and outside) the basic features of the current knowledge about how people learn, in general, and about how language is learned.

They will undertake personal networking to improve learning and decrease attrition, including regular and frequent partner/group work outside class.

They will have three oral tests (and maybe some other shorter or longer activities) each quarter; the first test of the first quarter may be a non-counting diagnostic. Their oral proficiency will be assigned an unofficial ACTFL rating late in the first year and will be documented on video.

Regular writing assignments will include draft and revision stages; there will be 3 writing tests each quarter (early [diagnostic ungraded in first quarter], a midterm, and a final), with focus both on the core content and the student's own environment.

Similar for listening and reading assignments and tests; some may be multi-skill.

They will undertake, per quarter, 4 projects (some short, some long) which customize the language to their own interests and circumstances (personal background, leisure / travel interests, vocation and career exploration)

They will experience, during the year, 10 cultural encounters, each related to the current core learning.

They will do one “Have fun with German” activity per week during the entire year.

They will explore, during the year, 10 topics related to concepts of language acquisition.

They will learn to carry out course-maintenance activities in German (mostly receptive skill with heavy TPR, but also keep manual of cues and responses); examples: negotiating group-purchase of course supplies; assembling portfolios; dry-run oral test with recording; using computer and web; name/place/table group tags; study group formation; exploration of local resources

They will have daily exposure to current events (US, German-speaking world, general world).

They will maintain a portfolio, with self-evaluations, and it will follow them throughout their study of German.

Several times a year they will find a way to experience German face-to-face outside the classroom.

What will they be able to DO (indicators and examples of activities) to prove they have accomplished those goals?

still to come; example:

Can use the target language to describe how oneself, a middle-class visitor to the middle-class culture of the target language, can spend a day carrying out basic daily activities (food, shelter, transportation, transactions) and several non-survival activities related to the culture. Sample language (reflects function, context and text type, but does not include moderate errors): "I eat breakfast in the hotel. It's included in the price of the room. Then I buy some postcards, go to the park, and buy picnic lunch there. I eat my lunch and write to my family. I tell them that this city is big and interesting. It has a lot of bridges and one church is 800 years old. I also say that I need more money, since I bought everyone a nice gift."

Can use the target language to:

arrange, in speaking and writing, to participate in an activity that involves a hobby, referring specifically to several of its actions and specialized content

How will they be judged (including how staff will handle the work of in-depth evaluation)?

Both curriculum-embedded and on-demand evaluations.

Portfolio documenting long-term progress and showcasing best work.

Heavy dependence on scoring guides, some generic, some test- or assignment-specific.

Some multiple-choice tests of reading and listening comprehension.

Use of computer to facilitate administration of scoring guides and record-keeping.

How will the success of this course be judged?

••[not yet drafted]

What will this course contribute to the department in terms of scholarship of teaching?

••[not yet drafted]; research data; grants