

# Articulating the German Language Curriculum

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## INTRODUCTION

German Language and Literature departments are currently experiencing a two-fold crisis. The first has to do with declining interest on the part of students in learning German in general, and the perceived lack of interest in literature in particular among a student body that is ever more career-minded and pragmatically oriented. The second has to do with an increasingly "corporate-minded" administration that is creating pressure to separate the "language teaching" enterprise from departments of foreign languages and literatures, and staff it with non tenure-track and/or part time "language teaching specialists." This double-edged sword is further exacerbating the traditional divide that still exists in many of our departments between "language" and "literature."

Although the language teaching profession has come a long way towards exposing this divide as a false dichotomy – the proficiency movement in particular has promoted a view of language as culturally embedded social practice (Kramsch) – it is still deeply entrenched in our institutional culture. We still distinguish "The Language Program" from the rest of the undergraduate curriculum. Yet in recent years, the crisis mentioned above has inspired many innovative attempts to integrate the language teaching enterprise into the larger cultural/literary studies mission of our departments (Byrnes, Berman, Kramsch, Swaffar, etc.). I have followed and supported these efforts, and tried over the last several years to incorporate them into an articulated German Language Program at Duke University. While what is presented here may reflect what many of our programs have indeed practiced for years, clear articulation of our curricular goals, content, and methods is absolutely necessary in countering the false perceptions of students, administrators, and our own colleagues about what actually happens in our introductory and lower division courses. It may also help promote larger discussions of curricular coherence, and the role of our departments within the university.

The articulated program presented here has developed during my tenure as Language Program Director in my department over the last 5 years. After a series of meetings and discussions begun in 1996 with colleagues and graduate student teaching assistants, I submitted to my department a draft proposal for an articulated German Language Program in 1997. This document included detailed and specific recommendations for each of our language courses with regard to goals, organization of syllabi, materials, instructional strategies, student assignments / tasks, and evaluation measures. Although it was adopted by the department, it remains a work in progress. The posters presented here outline its major elements in crystallized form.

In addition to my colleagues and graduate students, I gratefully acknowledge the inspirational and enormously influential work of Heidi Byrnes, Claire Kramsch, Janet Swaffar, and others (see selected bibliography) who have motivated a rethinking not only of our goals and pedagogies, but also of our roles within our various academic and social communities. The selected bibliography (see attached) includes the work of many colleagues who have contributed wonderful ideas for curriculum design as well as specific pedagogical strategies.

**Articulating the German Language Curriculum**  
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