

Information Literacy for German Language & Literature at the Graduate Level; New approaches and models

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At the University of Utah the recent hiring of several new faculty members in the German Language and Literature Section of the Modern Languages department has resulted in an increased demand for library services in the area of instruction and technical support. Areas explored will include approaches to instruction, content of instruction, assessment of teaching and library outreach and how these efforts foster an inter-disciplinary relationship between the library and German Section of the Modern Languages Department.

Academic libraries have consistently been on the cusp of new technologies and innovative services since the early 1990's. The reaction from faculty to these changes has ranged from indifference, to dismay, to pleasant surprise with these new services and technologies. The division of German Language and Literature in the Department of Modern Languages is just one department that has had to cope with change, yet within this department there is a generational gap not necessarily defined by age but by the length of tenure in service in the profession and their beliefs not only in building collections, but also with the practice of information literacy ; teaching students not only how to find the information they need in this area, but also applying it in a scholarly use and method. This involves at times, working closely with a librarian who is subject specialist in the field of German Language and Literature.

The American Library Association defines Information Literacy as, “To be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information”.¹ An Educom Review article published in 1996 takes this definition a step further by defining information literacy as "A new liberal art that extends from knowing how to use computers and access information to critical reflection on the nature of information itself its technical infrastructure and its social cultural and philosophical context and impact."² This latter

definition encompasses the role that technology has taken in libraries and education.

Historically, American librarians began teaching bibliography (today known as information literacy) in the early twentieth century, several American librarians were using the model of German Universities to promote bibliographic instruction.³ In Germany, then as now university courses were primarily in a traditional lecture format that lasted an entire academic year as compared to American universities where classes are limited to time at a quarter or a semester.⁴ Over time, it was not uncommon for students to skip lectures over the year for more leisurely pursuits such as fencing, hiking and other non-academic pursuits, however the lectures in bibliography of the course material were some of the most popular and well attended of lectures of the academic year because they provided students with the material to study for their final exams even if they missed a majority of the class lectures.

Today, information literacy is a core component in the curriculum at many colleges and universities in the United States and Canada. Examples of this can be found in integrated class sessions and online tutorial modules conducted by librarians in numerous subjects to more formalized instruction in classes that earn academic credit towards undergraduate degrees. At the University of Utah when bibliographic instruction began in German, the method of teaching was similar to other class integrated courses using a “one shot” session where a librarian teaches the primary information resources for the discipline. At German universities today information literacy is still in its infancy and in many cases is just being developed as part of the curriculum.⁵

In the fall of 2006 two new faculty members were hired in the German Division of the Modern Languages Department at the University of Utah. In the past the German Division did not avail itself to the services of information literacy instruction offered by the Marriott Library, in fact the faculty view of the German Subject Specialist librarian was just to evaluate and purchase works for the collection. Even with the arrival of new faculty, information literacy was not a great concern even after a general orientation of the library and its’ services, it looked as though library instruction would continue not to be a part of the graduate program in German.

That fall, after the first research papers were turned in by graduate students to a new member of the German faculty, almost immediately there were

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requests by the new faculty to have librarians involved in “one shot” instruction sessions in resources for German Language & Literature at the graduate level. The reason behind this was the first round of research papers used none of the traditional resources that one would cite for research in German and the only informational sources that was cited were wikipia and Google which contained a number of errors in the information on German literature. Interestingly, none of graduate students in the class had discovered Google scholar. The one noticeable change for the classes as compared to others is that faculty members requested that the classes be jointly taught by the faculty themselves and the librarian who was the subject specialist for German Language and Literature. Faculty were deeply concerned over the research skills of not only the American students in the graduate level program but also the native German speaking students which comprise approximately half of the graduate students in the program.

When the decision was made to incorporate library instruction in the Graduate level German course, there were a number of resources which were considered. It was decided between the instructor of the course and the librarian teaching the informational resources to use the following print and electronic sources:

Electronic Resources:

- *Academic Search Premier*: The world's largest academic multi-disciplinary database, *Academic Search Premier* provides full text for nearly 4,500 journals, including full text for more than 3,600 peer-reviewed titles.
- *Modern Language Association Directory of Periodicals*: The *MLA Directory of Periodicals* offers detailed information on over 7,100 journals, with 4,400 currently indexed in the International Bibliography.
- *Modern Language Association International Bibliography*: *MLA International Bibliography* offers a detailed bibliography of journal articles, books and dissertations. Produced by the Modern Language Association, the electronic version of the bibliography dates back to the 1920s .
- *JSTOR*: Developed with the help of the Modern Language Association, this collection includes a range of core German journals in the diverse fields of literary criticism that have emerged in the last thirty years.
- *Literary Encyclopedia*: Written by over 1400 specialists from universities around the world, and currently providing over 3700 authoritative profiles of authors, works and literary and historical topics, with plans to publish at least 800 new profiles (1.6m words) in 2007. They list nearly 19,000 works by date, country and genre.
- *Periodicals Index Online (PCI)*: Periodicals Contents Index - a database of article citations published in the arts, humanities and social sciences.
- *Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts*: Covers all aspects of the study of language including phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Complete coverage is also given to various



fields of linguistics including descriptive, historical, comparative,
theoretical and geographical linguistics

- *Germananistik.net*: Internet Resources for Germanists: This web site is sponsored by the German Department at the University of Wisconsin at Madison and is a portal to over 1800 resources in the fields of German Literature and Philology.

It was also strongly encouraged that the graduate students in German subscribe to the H-NET list-serv H-Germanistik which covers the field of German Literature and Philology.

Print Resources:

- *Grundriss zur Geschichte der Deutsche Dichtung (Goedeke)*: A German Language resources which provides the literary history of numerous German language texts. As been called by many Germanists the single most important bibliographic tool for German literature up to 1830

- *Biography der Deutsche Sprach und Literaturwissenschaft*: An index which covers large amounts of German literature not covered in MLA. It also covers secondary literature resources such as bibliographies, book reviews, and dissertations.
- *Deutsches Literatur Lexikon*: This multi-volume set provides citations to German writers, philosophers and theologians. Often contains obscure citations to works which don't appear elsewhere.

Although there are other print indexes in the field of German language and Literature, these were the resources that were stressed by the faculty member in German and the German Subject Specialist Librarian. Three library catalogs which were presented to find unusual or obscure works of German literature were Worldcat, an online catalog of almost all books in U.S. and some foreign libraries and the catalogs of Harvard and Yale Universities which contain some of the largest collections of German Literature outside of Germany. What was found in using each of these resources was that the German Language indexes carried significantly more information than the English language indexes.

A case study for these informational resources was tested for the German author Heinrich von Kleist and his book *Die Verlobung in Santo Domingo* (Betrothal in Santo Domingo) published in 1811. As mentioned earlier the original papers on Kleist and his book contained light weight information from wikipedia and a handful and non-scholarly web sites found in Google. The final results with the second round of graduate student papers contained a significant improvement in the level of scholarship and academic content. Students were doing much more in-depth research using these content rich indexes. The biggest surprise for the students was the differences in the amount of information between the *Biography der Deutsche Sprach und Literaturwissenschaft* and the *Modern Language Association International Bibliography: MLA International Bibliography*. Since a majority of these students are pursuing Ph.D. studies either at the University of Utah or other institutions, these students have gained knowledge of valuable and practical research tools for German philology. A more formal method of assessment for instruction is being developed by the Marriott Library for future classes.

Another unexpected result of library integrated instruction was that the professor of the course decided to have students make their presentations via

the web and requested further instruction from the library for dream weaver; a web design software package, these courses were taught by the student computing librarian.

Lastly, perhaps the most important lesson these students learned is about the value of a librarian and the help that is available to them to terms of services, technology and collections. This was especially a pleasant surprise for the native German students; unfortunately the typical exposure to library services at German universities is one of poor customer service, and the environment is one where deep caste system exists in the level of service between faculty and students at university libraries.⁶ More importantly, it is hoped that the new faculty member shares her positive experiences at the Marriott Library with her colleagues and that this will lead to more teaching opportunities for the Marriott Library.

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