GERMAN STUDIES MAJOR

MAJOR DESCRIPTION

THE GERMAN CURRICULUM FOCUSES ON THREE MAJOR PERIODS.

ENLIGHTENMENT, WEIMAR CLASSICISM, ROMANTICISM (1650–1830)
The 18th century laid the foundation for the emergence of modern Germany. Many literary and philosophical works exhibit the immense joy, hope, anxiety, and work that went into reorganizing the relationship between the individual, society, and the world after religious and hierarchical certainties collapsed in the upheaval of the Thirty Years’ War and the armed conflicts and revolutions that followed. Unlike other European cultures, the German-speaking area undertook this reorganization without a territorially unified state. The powerful desire for cultural and political unity gave rise to ideas about the function, value, and precarious status of individuality, and to concepts of art, nature, Bildung, and progress that continue to inform ways in which we think of the world today.

LIBERALISM, MODERNISM, FASCISM (1830–1945)
With the deaths of Hegel in 1831 and Goethe in 1832, the formative period for a culturally unified Germany came to an end. Contradictions in German liberalism—between universalist values and an increasingly exclusionary construction of national identity—created a widening rift between writers and thinkers who were committed to revolutionary change and those whose work drew on images of a preindustrial way of life. With the establishment of the German nation in 1871, accompanied by a rise in militarism and colonial aspirations, both progressive and reactionary tendencies in German culture became even more pronounced. These tendencies beset the Weimar Republic, during which Jews and other minorities enjoyed unprecedented freedom of expression, yet authoritarian “solutions” to economic convulsions and social conflict increasingly gained adherents. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, they consigned artistic modernism to the category of “degenerate art.” Many leading cultural figures were forced into exile. Those who remained in the country either tolerated or supported the regime.

COLD WAR, POSTMODERNISM, NEOLIBERALISM (POST-1945)
German culture since the end of the genocidal Nazi era has been defined by twin desires for a new beginning and for a retrieval of the humanist and progressive elements of the German tradition. While in socialist East Germany the claim to represent that tradition became official state policy, in West Germany the influence of American and British popular culture gave rise to new forms of cultural expression. Yet many modernist writers collided with a post-traumatic society in which former Nazis still occupied important offices (West Germany) or historical responsibility for fascism was denied outright (East Germany and Austria). Not until the cultural revolution of the 1960s did the conformist postwar culture begin to give way to a new diversity, and in the 1970s and 1980s new feminist, queer, and immigrant voices emerged. With the end of the German Democratic Republic in 1990, Germany entered the current era in which it has found itself playing a challenging new political role as the dominant country in the EU. The current refugee crisis and the accelerating growth of economic inequality have spawned new forms of cultural activism, especially in the visual and performing arts.

STUDENT LEARNING GOALS

The German studies major is designed to allow students to explore the rich and diverse cultures of the German-speaking countries through a flexible interdisciplinary program that stimulates the students’ creative and critical capacities and can serve as the basis for future academic or professional study or employment.

The specific goals are as follows:

• Knowledge of the German language: Courses are designed to enable students to achieve at least advanced mid-level proficiency in speaking and comprehending spoken German, according to the ACTFL guidelines. Students will have ample opportunity to become fluent and accurate writers of German in a variety of genres and contexts.
• Intercultural literacy: Students can expect to gain insight into unfamiliar cultural attitudes and artifacts, which enables them to be open-minded and competent participants in their own and foreign environments.
• Historical breadth: Students will be able to acquire insight into the development of the German-language cultures from the Enlightenment to the present and those cultures’ impact on Western civilization and other cultures.
• Knowledge of the field of German studies: Through their courses, majors become acquainted with techniques of textual interpretation, with the scope of the field, and with prevailing research methods and disciplinary tools.
• Experience in German-speaking countries: Students will receive strong encouragement and support to experience aGerman-speaking country firsthand through study abroad during the academic year or the summer, internships, thesis/capstone research, or study or teaching after graduation.

ADMISSION TO THE MAJOR

To become a German studies major, a student should have no grade lower than a B in any course taken in the department. The department recognizes the diversity of student interests and goals by giving its majors great flexibility in designing their programs of study. Students should work closely with their major advisors to put together coherent courses of study and assure that they will make steady progress toward mastery of the German language. The department strongly recommends that majors fulfill Stages I and II of the General Education Expectations.
STUDY ABROAD

For more information about studying abroad in Germany, please visit our department website. (http://www.wesleyan.edu/german/studyabroad.html)

Please make sure to check the application procedures and deadlines for your program as well as those for Wesleyan’s Office of Study Abroad (http://www.wesleyan.edu/cgs/osaa), located in Fisk Hall 201.

Those students for whom study abroad is not possible during the fall or spring semester should consult with the department about the possibility of taking courses during the summer.

ADVANCED PLACEMENT

See Advanced Placement Credit (http://www.wesleyan.edu/registrar/general_information/ap_ib_credit.html) information. Students with prior knowledge of German should take the online placement examination before registering for courses. For information about the placement test, please contact Emmanuel Paris-Bouvret (eparis@wesleyan.edu) in the Fries Center for Global Studies.

PRIZES

Students who demonstrate excellence in the study of German may be candidates for prizes given from the Scott, Prentice, and Blankenagel funds. Students seeking modest funding for special projects can apply for the Helmut and Erika Reihlen Fund (http://www.wesleyan.edu/german/scholarships_prizes.html).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

German Haus is a wood-frame house at 65 Lawn Avenue, with six single rooms and one double, that provides a vibrant center for German-themed events and activities on campus. Whether discussing current events over coffee and pastries, interpreting poems, watching classic or contemporary films, or hearing about faculty members’ research, the residents and their guests can explore a multitude of interests.

HONORS

- Eligibility. To become a candidate for honors in German studies, a student must have earned a B+ or better in all German studies courses above GRST211.
- Candidacy. A prospectus must be handed in and approved by the prospective tutor or the department chair by the end of the Reading Period in the spring of the junior year. Enrollment in senior thesis tutorials (GRST409 and GRST410) is required. Candidates for honors in German studies and another department or program may be required to have two thesis tutors. The two departments or programs must agree in advance about the tutoring arrangement and evaluation of the honors project.
- Honors projects. Honors can be earned only for two-semester projects.
- Deadlines. Deadlines for nomination to candidacy and submission of the honors project are set by the Committee on Honors.

- Evaluation and award of honors. Honors projects will be evaluated by the tutor(s) and at least two other readers. A student receiving high honors may, at the department’s discretion and subject to the guidelines of the Committee on Honors, be nominated to take the oral examination for University Honors.

CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE

Students who wish to undertake a one-semester capstone project have wide latitude as to the topic, medium, and form they choose. They should discuss their idea with a member of the department and enroll in an individual tutorial (GRST401 or GRST402) supervised by a German studies or affiliated faculty member.