

Department of German
Assessment Update Spring 2009

The Department of German recently added an Undergraduate Certificate in German that was developed in response to address student need based on assessment of student learning and interest.

Over the past several years, the department has witnessed significant growth in the number of students who are interested in pursuing advanced study in German, but not at the level of a major. More precisely, students enrolled in German courses at the beginning and intermediate levels regularly express a desire to obtain a certificate in German as a complement to other major area(s) of study. In order to understand this trend better, the department undertook a formal survey of students who take German but are not intending to become German majors. The results of this survey lent quantitative support to previous anecdotal evidence: that an Undergraduate Certificate in German will be a useful complement to the undergraduate program.

On a larger level, creating such a certificate promotes a number of the Essential Learning Outcomes articulated as part of The Wisconsin Experience. Foreign language learning by its very nature advances “knowledge of human cultures” in a direct way. But also in terms of “intellectual and practical skills,” the experience of reflecting on the ways that language is connected to how humans think and interact with one another enables students to communicate more effectively in their native language and increases their ability to think more critically and creatively. Finally, this proposed certificate program is rooted in the idea that the study of German (and all foreign languages) is part of an integrative whole, whereby “content” and “skills” are inextricably linked. The evidence from the survey showed clearly that the availability of an Undergraduate Certificate in German will encourage and support students who wish to engage in this kind of learning by offering a credential to acknowledge their accomplishments.