Letter from the Chair
Dear friends of the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures,

On this beautiful late summer day, as we prepare for another ereignisreiches academic year, I think back to the many messages that have reached me from departmental alumni as far away as New Zealand and Germany, but also from around the GTA. We captured some of their impressions in our website series “Where are they now?”, organized by our tireless, award-winning Departmental Alumni Ambassador and Executive in Residence, Joan Andersen. Among other things, we asked: How have your German Studies equipped you with the skills you need to do your job? We got great answers. The response from Rene Samulewitsch, who made a career for himself in communication and public relations following graduation from U of T, struck a special note with me:

German is a critical thinking language. It has grammar rules and sentence structure that are complex and require quite a bit of retention. You can’t “wing” German. This background has helped me better review client materials, ask the right questions, and review written materials for grammar, context and understanding. Speaking German has helped me win new business when the client team had a German connection, helped me deal with international (German) media and even brought me to Munich for a client product launch.

“Critical thinking” is, of course, a skill that most especially the disciplines of the Humanities inculcate. Rene’s remark highlights how the process of learning German trains students to think critically, and indeed, to see both the forest and the trees. A deep competence in German language and culture can become a key opening international career opportunities. And yes, “you can’t ‘wing’ German,” which many students, alumni, and instructors would agree is actually a good thing. This might be one of the reasons why our Department has one of the highest German program enrolments in North America despite generally declining enrolments throughout the Humanities. Our students like complexity, and they like becoming conversant in a “critical thinking language.”

We hope this newsletter, edited by Angelica Fenner and produced and coordinated by Helena Juenger, will convey to you the excitement of ‘things German’ at the University of Toronto. It features thrilling new ventures gaining momentum, such as our iPRAKTIKUM initiative, which provides international work-integrated learning experiences in Germany and with German companies, educational institutions, and NGOs. As well, undergraduate and graduate students pursuing Yiddish studies in our program displayed creativity and ingenuity in assembling the Robarts Library exhibit, “Discovering the Mame Loshn,” the first such installation at U of T in 20 years. Also featured are no less than four conferences that took place last year, including: the Frankfurt-Toronto Graduate Colloquium, the graduate conference “Pulver möcht’ ich schreiben,” the first such installation at U of T in 20 years. Also featured are no less than four conferences that took place last year, including: the Frankfurt-Toronto Graduate Colloquium, the graduate conference “Pulver möcht’ ich schreiben,” the annual Toronto German Studies Symposium spearheaded this year by Prof. Stefan Soldovieri on the topic of the Environmental Humanities, and the international conference “Transnational Perspectives on Black Germany,” coordinated by Prof. Angelica Fenner in collaboration with the Black German Heritage and Research Association.

External support plays a vital role in the transformative activities organized within our Department. Gifts from the wider community of the Department’s friends, colleagues, emeriti, and alumni have, for example, been crucial to the creation of undergraduate and graduate scholarships that enable us to attract the best and brightest students to our department. Please continue to keep these and other forms of support in mind. I also invite you to come to our many events in the coming year and to connect in this and other ways with the Department.

Markus Stock
Chair of Germanic Languages & Literatures
Associate Professor of German & Medieval Studies
by Professor Angelica Fenner, Associate Chair, Graduate Studies

It has been another industrious year for our Graduate Program in German Literature, Culture, and Theory. Last Fall we hosted a two-day graduate colloquium in cooperation with Professor Carola Hilmes of the Goethe-Universität, bringing four students from Frankfurt am Main to our campus to join four of our own - Laurence Côté-Pitre, Veronica Curran, William Ohm, and Tobias Wilczek - in sharing research in progress, copped by a thesis writing workshop sponsored by the School of Graduate Studies. Reflecting their program’s access to the Frankfurter Buchmesse with its emphasis on “das literarische Verfahren,” the Frankfurter students brought out unique angles on the marketing of the authoritative persona and performative qualities of self-inscription in contemporary literature.

In April, our students took the lead in organizing a graduate conference that drew presenters from four continents to the Munk School of Global Affairs to deliver talks whose topical range spanned “schwules Schreiben,” vitalism in Schiller’s work, Schlegel’s poetics of the fragment, and Yiddishkayt. Closing with Dr. Peter Schwegge’s keynote on activist graffiti in Berlin, the event was also enhanced by access to Robarts Library to the remarkable travelling exhibit “Culpaöe” — a display of two centuries of Austrian women’s social and literary engagement brought to our campus through PhD student William Ohm’s coordinated efforts with the Austrian Cultural Forum.

Our students continue to secure important external funding for their research. Second-year doctoral student Veronica Curran garnered a SSHRC grant for her upcoming thesis on social ethics in nineteenth-century German drama, and incoming international PhD student André Fliker has been awarded a Connaught Fellowship. MA student Livia Rijick and PhD student Laurence Côté-Pitre received travel funding from the DAD for their researches on East German topics: respectively, the musealization of industrial landscapes and the literary avant-garde in Prenzlauer Berg.

Following on the heels of no less than six dissertation defenses that took place a year ago, our program is replenishing its ranks again this Fall with five new PhD students and six MA students, all domestic, with the exception of one international joining via UBC’s MA Program in Germanic Studies. We look forward to another full and productive year ahead, beginning with the seven highly diverse graduate courses on offer from our faculty this Fall.

ENHANCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRADUATE RESEARCH

by Professors Erol Boran, Associate Chair, Undergraduate Studies

A healthy undergraduate program is the backbone of any department. Our department continues to thrive and has even succeeded in increasing enrolment over the past decade. We are proud of this but remain aware of future challenges and strive to address them through continuing curriculum renewal and by introducing new courses, textbooks and pedagogical approaches. Here are some highlights of the past year:

- Prof. Hang-Sun Kim organized the workshop “Animatizing the Language Classroom,” featuring speakers from the University of Waterloo and McGill University, the University of British Columbia, and the Goethe-Institut Toronto on topics such as technology in the classroom, online teaching, reading skills, grammar and classroom management.
- Prof. Stefan Soldovieri organized the 11th Annual Toronto German Studies Symposium on the topic of environmental humanities. Panels explored the role the humanities can play in imagining paths to a sustainable future.
- Prof. Soldovieri’s engagement also led to the establishment of a new undergraduate course, “Global Issues,” which explores the contemporary character of globalization patterns and problems.

As the above highlights reveal, 2017-18 was a rich and productive year for undergraduate studies in our department.

HIGHLIGHTS IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES

by Anastasia Liu

As an “artistic type” studying Developmental Biology, I woreied of my classmates’ endless memorization and regurgitative testing, with “creative projects” limited to writing about Vic One courses which emphasized classroom discussion, critical thinking, collaboration, and an overall marriage of Art and Science. Now in third year, taking Ger200, I decided to sign up for GER310 because I enjoy inconvienencing the Verwaltungsbürde (administration) about not meeting prerequisites. To my surprise and delight, Professor Soldovieri approved my enrolment and proceed to blow me away with his course deviously generalized as “Contemporary German Culture and Media.” GER310 embodied everything I cherished about Vic One; every class was an analysis/roast session on grammar and classroom management, and established myself as a jaded nihilist for marks, all while fast-tracking my German abilities beyond the Ger200 level to the envy of my peers.

In summary, I am grateful that my German minor offers me a well-rounded undergraduate career and provides an engaging, personal atmosphere created by passionate lecturers. It is something the typical science student will, unfortunately, never know.

ON HIDDING A PHD

by Christin Bohmke, PhD

“Hide your PhD”? That was the advice I was given when I attended a U of T panel on non-academic career paths. Three years into my graduate studies, I made the decision to leave academia, partly because I knew working conditions would be less than ideal upon graduation, but also because I no longer saw my beliefs and values reflected in the academic world. Yet hiding my PhD, hiding something towards which I had worked so hard, not only felt wrong, it felt impossible.

Upon graduating in summer 2017, launched my job search with an overly optimistic resolve: I would be hired because of my PhD, not despite it. To my own surprise, it worked. After four weeks of job hunting I signed a contract with a Berlin-based NGO as their new administrator and projects officer. I was lucky that my employer understood that my PhD gave me great transferable skills and that they trusted me to apply them to highly diversified tasks. The good economic climate in Germany certainly also helped.

I now spend most of my time writing grants for projects that aim to give refugees access to higher education in Germany, Jordan, and Lebanon. The team and I are responsible for all aspects of our future projects: content, funding, budget, partnerships. Every day is different, and I enjoy the variety and responsibility I am also a project manager myself and, in that role, I am organizing community events such as a female empowerment week for refugees in Berlin. These are real projects, and they are quite different from any PhD, but they really aren’t: the writing skills that I learned as a PhD student are crucial for my work, so are my abilities to prioritize and to work under pressure.

Do I need a PhD for my work? The short answer is no - although the title helps when negotiating with external partners - but without the skills that I acquired during my graduate work, I would not have gained my current job. So my advice to current graduate students is this: be confident in your skills and pursue the non-academic track if that feels right to you. And don’t hide your PhD.
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A highlight of the event was the presentation of an installation – commissioned especially for the Symposium – by environmental artist Paul C. Chang. Chang’s work on the German homophones säen (to sow) and sehen (to see), ‘hoffnung sehen / see(d)ing hope’ takes up a number of the artist’s central concerns: the idea of plants as living collaborators, the relationship between nature, culture, and perception, and the effort to create scenarios in which humans engage in a productive exchange with the vegetative. In this work, the text in the form of living, speckled pea shoots visible through etched glass.

In his contribution to the kick-off panel, ‘Sustainability in an Imaginary World’, Prof. John Robinson, U of T Presidential Adviser on the Environment, Climate Change, and Sustainability, offered hope of a positive way forward in a notion of ‘regenerative sustainability’. Prof. Robinson urged us to shift our focus from doing less bad to doing more good, from damage control to creating benefits, from making sacrifices to making contributions. If there was a single theme that emerged from the symposium, it was that the humanities have a crucial role to play in helping to imagine this path to a livable future.

A lot has happened since our kick-off networking event in March 2017! Last fall, we launched a successful ‘German in the City’ pilot with the University of Toronto Schools (UTS) that is being continued through the support of the Milestones & Pathways fund. This next phase will include advanced undergraduates, who will be mentored by grad student interns and our fabulous lead teacher on site, Nicola Townend. Early results show students gain valuable experience in education and make career contacts; the school benefits from enhanced instruction through enthusiastic U of T students, enriched extracurricular experiences, and support in bridging teaching gaps.

A grant from the Advanced Teaching and Learning in Arts & Science (ATLAS) program has supported our project development, which has included an environmental scan, research on best practices in experiential learning, the creation of a comprehensive database of potential GTA partners, and student focus groups. iPRAKTIKUM is ready to help find work-related placements designed to deepen skills acquired in the classroom, provide language practice, and promote connections to local and global communities.

This year’s graduate conference, “Pulver möchte ich schreiben”: Engagement in the German Tradition was inspired by the work of Theodor Mundt. In a passage from Moderne Lebenswirren in 1834, he states, “Pulver möchte ich schreiben, in die Zeit hinaus, und auf dem Streitroß meiner kriehenden Gedanken möchte ich als ein Held ausziehen in das Schlachtgetümmel der Geschichte.” Here, Mundt expresses his passionate desire to change the world through art, deconstructing it to ensure its progressive future. Bringing together an international group of scholars from Germany, the United States, China, and Nigeria, the conference asked its participants: What can the German tradition teach us about the role of the Arts as a means to shape the world?

Across two days of presentations and discussions, each participant demonstrated their singular affinity for Mundt’s statement. Attendees were confronted with various manifestations of the written, spoken, sprayed, and glued word that enable social engagement. Beginning with the vitalist Lebenskraft present in art as much as in humans and other living beings, participants were propelled into a realm of fragmentation, which may, after all, be quite universal, but also violent. Fragmentation, whether linguistic, cultural, or personal, brings into focus new perspectives on our personal engagement. We gained inspiration from a visit to the Calliope exhibit at Robarts Library, installed to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Austrian Republic through a focus on women’s suffrage that serendipitously coincides with the recent #METOO campaign.

Prof. Peter Schweppe’s keynote address introduced artists like “Barbara” and Ines-Mensah-Schramm, whose work breaks with the popular perception of graffiti as vandalism and instead democratizes resistance to social hate, violence, and inequality. Discussions across our two-day gathering revealed that we live in times of great change. As students and scholars of the humanities, we study authors and artists of the past as a means to generate new knowledge with which to improve our future. Every individual who has or is currently contributing to this field does so to articulate their ideas and be heard by others. They wish to motivate people, to engage in dialogue, to exchange thoughts and beliefs, and create partnerships. If society in the past has valued force over the power of reason, and authority over the gift of community, many people are now moving towards more autonomous forms of being, identity, and culture. We are coming to terms with the fact that standing up to hate, socio-political violence, and environmental injustice also means continuing to organize gatherings like this one.

Special Note

Canadians who haven’t claimed a donation tax credit since 2007 can take advantage of the new First-Time Donors Super Credit. For your donation of $200 and under, you are eligible for a tax credit of 40%; and for your donation of $201 to $1,000, you are eligible for a tax credit of 54%. Please consider this benefit when making your gift to the Hermann Boeschenstein Memorial Fellowship in German. Your gift postmarked before December 31, 2018 will be eligible for a 2017 income tax receipt.
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