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Information Literacy for German Language and Literature at the Graduate Level: New Approaches and Models

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Introduction

Since at least the early 1990s, academic libraries have consistently been on the cusp of new technologies and innovative services. The reaction from teaching faculty has ranged from indifference, to dismay, to pleasant surprise. The division of German Language and Literature in the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Utah is just one department that has had to cope with change, and there is a "generation gap" in the department that is not necessarily defined by age but by the length of service and beliefs about building collections and information literacy, teaching students how to find the information they need and also how to apply it in scholarship. The faculty in the division of German Language and Literature work closely with librarian who is subject specialist in the field.

Information literacy is the ability, "to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (American Library Association 1998). Shapiro and Hughes (1996) take 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." The latter definition encompasses the role that technology has taken in libraries and education.

American librarians began teaching "bibliography" (known today as information literacy) in the early twentieth century. Some American librarians used the German model for bibliographic instruction (Bishop 1912). In Germany, then as now, university courses were primarily in a lecture format and lasted an entire academic year, in contrast with American universities where classes generally last one quarter or semester (Hempl 1890). While it was not uncommon for students to skip lectures in favor of leisurely pursuits such as fencing, hiking, and other non-academic activities, the lectures in bibliography were some of the

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most popular and well attended of the academic year, because they provided students with the material to study for the their final exams even if they had missed a majority of their other class lectures.

At German universities today, information literacy is still in its infancy and in many cases is just being developed as part of the curriculum (Homann 2003). In the United States and Canada, information literacy is a core component in the curriculum at many colleges and universities. Examples of this can be found in integrated class sessions and online tutorial modules conduct by librarians in numerous subjects to more formalized instruction in classes that earn academic credit. When bibliographic instruction for German classes began at the University Utah, the method of teaching was similar to other class integrated courses: a "one shot" session where a librarian teaches the primary information resources for the discipline.

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. That fall, after the first research papers were turned in by graduate students in the M.A. program in German to a new member of the German faculty, almost immediately there were requests by the new faculty to have librarians involved in "one shot" instruction sessions in resources for German Language and Literature at the graduate level. The German Division had not previously availed itself of the information literacy instruction offered by the Marriott Library. The faculty view of the German Subject Specialist librarian had been merely to evaluate and purchase works for the collection. Even with the arrival of new faculty, information literacy had not initially been of particular interest, even after a general orientation of the library and its services.

The reason for the sudden interest in information literacy was that 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 cited were Wikipedia and sources found using 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 new German faculty members requested that information literacy classes be jointly taught by the faculty themselves and the subject specialist librarian. The German faculty were concerned about the research skills of not only the American students in the program but also the native speakers of German who are about half the students in the program. When the decision was made to incorporate library instruction in the graduate level German program, the instructor of the course and the librarian teaching the information resources decided 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 more than 3,600 peer-reviewed titles.
- *Modern Language Association Directory of Periodicals.* The *MLA Directory of Periodicals* offers detailed information on more than 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 includes material from the 1920s forward.
- *JSTOR.* Developed with the help of the Modern Language Association, this collection includes a range of core German journals in the diverse areas of literary criticism that have emerged in the last thirty years.
- *Literary Encyclopedia.* This work was written by more than 1,400 specialists from universities around the world and currently providing some 3,700 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).* This index is includes citations to articles in the arts, humanities, and social sciences.
- *Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts.* This tool covers all aspects of the study of language including phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. There is also complete coverage of various fields of linguistics including descriptive, historical, comparative, theoretical, and geographical linguistics.
- *Germananistik.net. Internet Resources for Germanists.* This website is sponsored by the German Department at the University of Wisconsin--Madison and is a portal to more than 1,800 resources in German literature and philology.
- Graduate students in German were strongly encouraged to subscribe to the H-NET listserv H-Germanistik which covers German literature and philology.

Print Resources:

- *Grundriss zur Geschichte der deutschen Dichtung (Goedeke).* This is a German language resource that provides the literary history of numerous German texts. It has been called the single most important bibliographic tool for German literature up to 1830.
- *Bibliographie der deutschen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft.* This work is an index for large amounts of German literature not covered in MLA. It also covers secondary sources such as bibliographies, book reviews, and dissertations.

- *Deutsches Literatur Lexikon.* This multi-volume set provides citations to German writers, philosophers, and theologians, and often contains obscure citations to works which do not appear elsewhere.

Although there are other print indexes in German language and literature, these were considered essential. Three library catalogs which were used for unusual or obscure works of German literature: Worldcat, and the catalogs of Harvard and Yale Universities, which contain some of the largest collections of German literature outside Germany. Using each of these resources showed that the German language indexes had significantly more information than those in English.

The usefulness of these resources was tested using an assigned paper on 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 contained "lightweight" information from Wikipedia and a handful of non-scholarly websites found in google. The second round of papers were a significant improvement in the level of scholarship and academic content. Students were doing in-depth research using these content-rich indexes. The biggest surprise for the students was the differences in the amount of information between the *Bibliographie der deutschen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft* and the *MLA International Bibliography*. A majority of these students will pursue PhD studies at the University of Utah or other institutions, and they have gained knowledge of valuable and practical research tools for German philology that will prepare them for further study. A more formal assessment method for instruction is being developed by the Marriott Library for future classes.

Another unexpected result of library integrated instruction was that the course instructor decided to have students make their presentations via the web, and requested further instruction from the library in the use of DreamWeaver, a web design software package. That instruction was given by the student computing librarian.

Finally, perhaps the most important lesson these students learned is about the help that is available from the library in services, technology, and collections. This was an especially pleasant surprise for the native German students, who unfortunately had found library services at German universities to have poor customer service for students, with a deep caste system in the level of service given to faculty and students (Askey 2001). More importantly, it is hoped that the new faculty member shares her positive experiences at the with her colleagues and that this will lead to more teaching opportunities for the library.

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