

Teaching and Mentoring Statement

Doreen Densky

In essence, my teaching and mentoring revolve around dialogues: German-language conversations, intercultural communication, and exchanges of ideas. My task is to draw students into these dialogues by providing linguistic tools and fostering cultural awareness as well as critical thinking skills. I also aim to create an inclusive, joyful learning environment, in which students have their individual voices heard as they collaborate and mature as globally-minded citizens.

Driven by a communicative language teaching approach, communication is both goal and method in my classes. The first minutes of each meeting are typically devoted to dialogue that emerges organically, for instance about morning routines or current events. This open, adjustable format enables students to enter real-life conversations early on and encourages them to take an active role in their learning as they steer the discussion in a direction of their choice. I also incorporate authentic materials (film excerpts, news articles, literary texts) through which students see language structures before they are formally learned. This fosters intrinsic motivation to inquire about—and go beyond—these structures.

Since each student brings a unique blend of interests, learning styles, and skills, I give feedback based on individual progress. Students are asked to practice new vocabulary and grammar at their own pace prior to coming to class, where we dedicate time to applying the target language in meaningful contexts and with engaging activities such as role-plays, think-pair-shares, or debates. The dynamic setting of each class inspires me to design new materials tailored to the group's needs, and I am always grateful for student feedback to fine-tune my approach.

The foreign-language classroom is also a space to address some of the pressing issues of our time. It offers opportunities to deconstruct stereotypes, develop intercultural competence, and integrate multiple disciplinary perspectives. The collaborative final project in a recent upper-level class on contemporary German society, culture, and media showcased this: Students chose topics that combined the course themes with their other study interests and wrote illustrated articles (whether creative, historically informed, involving environmental science, or reflecting socio-linguistics). I compiled and shared their contributions in a course magazine I created, *Zeitgeist*.

As a mentor, I supervised two independent studies while serving as Director of Undergraduate Studies over the past two years as well as an honors thesis. Listening with an open mind, I strive to help students channel their ideas into cohesive study plans and productive research experiences. As Interim and Summer Language Program Coordinator, I am in ongoing dialogue with colleagues to navigate shifting challenges to teaching and I conduct teaching-related research. This continuous commitment to learning is a vital aspect of the profession, which I emphasize when mentoring new graduate student instructors.

Guiding students to use a foreign language to expand their worldview is a passion for me. My most rewarding moments include when students, who continue inquiries we touched on in our classes in ways that most resonate with them, share their stories of further studies or interacting in German at work in our increasingly globalized world.