German | 2016-2017 Assessment Report

1. Please give a brief overview of the assessment data you collected this year.

The Learning Outcome the German Program assessed this year was Learning Outcome #6: "Have read great works of German literature and have a sense of their place in literary history." We conducted this assessment during spring semester 2017 in German 329: Representative German Authors. This upper-level course in German literature is a required course for all students graduating with a German major or minor. For many students in the program, although certainly not all, this is their first introduction to German literature, although several have already had other courses in literature, history or art history as part of their other majors/minors or the general education program.

Since this course requires of all enrolled students to read major works of German literature, we know that they (and in fact, all of our graduates) met the first part of this learning outcome, namely, that they "have read great works of German literature." This spring, for example, they read works from medieval poetry and *Das Hildebrandtslied* to literature by Goethe, the Grimm brothers, Chamisso, Kafka, Rilke, Brecht and Dürrenmatt. All German majors are also required to take at least two additional courses in German literature and minors two additional courses from a list of electives, half of which are also literature courses.

We used two methods of direct assessment to evaluate the second part of this learning outcome, namely students' ability to place these works within literary history: #1.) we created a pre-/post-assessment (value-added) tool to measure any improvement during the semester in the students' ability to place German authors and their works correctly within literary history, and #2.) we analyzed student responses at the end of the course to Part I of a final essay assignment prompt at the end of the course, designed to evaluate students' depth of understanding of a single literary period of their choice.

Assessment #1:
The assessment tool, which we administered on the first and last days of the course, assessed students' ability to a.) place 11 different literary periods in proper chronological order, b.) indicate the century or centuries corresponding to each period and c.) list any authors, artists, works and historical events associated with each period.

Results of Assessment #1: Pre- and Post- Assessments (from beginning and end of the course):

Assessment #1	Average # Errors (out of 11 literary periods)	Course Average % Correct			Average # Errors (out of 11 literary periods)	Course Average % Correct
Begin of Semester:				End of Semester:		
#1a: Literary Periods	4.58	58.33%		#1a: Literary Periods	1.75	84.08%
#1b: Indicate Century	8.33	24.24%		#1b: Indicate Century	3.25	76.51%
TOTAL Course Average		**41.28%**		TOTAL Course Average		**80.29%**
#1c: Authors/works/events	**Correct Associations:** 15			#1c: Authors/works/events	**Correct Associations:** 290	

Assessment #1a:
On the first day of the course zero of the students were able to put all 11 literary periods in their correct chronological order. Two students only made 1 error (90.91%) and 1 other student only made 3 errors (72.73%), however all of the rest of the 12 students on the first day of the course received a score of 63.63% or lower, bringing the entire course average score down to 58.33%, indicating an almost total lack of ability to perform this task at the beginning of this course. By the end of the course, the students demonstrated an impressive improvement in their ability to complete this task correctly. After one semester, all but three of the students scored 81% or higher (almost half of the students achieved 90% or higher, 2 received 100%). Of these remaining 3 students, 2 received 72.73% and 1 student (who sporadically attended class) received a 63.63%. As indicated above, the overall course score average on this challenge increased from 58.33% at the beginning of the course to 84.08% at the end.

Assessment #1b:
Similarly, zero students were able to assign centuries to all 11 literary periods at the beginning of the course. In fact the highest score any individual student achieved at the beginning of the course was only 54.54%, bringing the overall average score for the entire course on the first day of the course to only 24.24%. By the end of the semester, this same group of students scored an average of 76.51% on this assessment. Whereas none of the students scored above a 54.54% at the beginning of the course, half of them scored 81% or higher by the end of the course. Although 4 students still scored poorly (54-63%) at the end of the semester, even their scores increased dramatically (up from either 0-18%). As indicated above, the overall course score average on this assessment increased from 24.24% at the beginning of the course to 76.51% at the end.

Assessment #1c:
Zero students at the beginning of the course were able to associate any authors, works, and/or events correctly with all of the literary periods. Indeed, well over half left all or all but one literary period blank. The total number of correct associations from the entire class for all literary periods at the beginning of the course was only 15, which increased significantly to 290 by the end of the semester, indicating that after one semester they had a much more nuanced

understanding of the literary periods and were now able to associate many more authors, works, and/or events with each one.

Assessment #2:

For this second part of our assessment we created a rubric to evaluate student responses to an essay prompt (translated below), which was Part I of the final essay assignment in the course. Using the rubric, we evaluated these essays on the basis of students' ability to a.) demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the period, b.) provide sufficient reasons to substantiate their claims about the period and c.) provide sufficient and accurate textual and factual evidence to support their claims. The purpose of this second assessment was less a matter of assessing students' familiarity with factual information about German literature than it was to evaluate how well or poorly they were able to apply, integrate and reason with this knowledge in order to demonstrate a more convincing and in-depth understanding of a literary period.

Final Essay Prompt – Part I (translated):

1. **Periods of German Literature.** We have discussed many representative works, authors and genres from a variety of literary periods in this course. Choose one literary period and one or two literary works and present a convincing argument to explain, using as many reasons and examples as possible, to what extent these works are or are not typical of that literary period.

Results of Assessment #2:

Assessment #2: Final Essay – Part I *Rubric: (5 highest ------ 1 lowest)*	
#2a: Nuance: Ability to demonstrate a nuanced understanding of the period	3.33
#2b: Reasoning: Ability to provide sufficient reasons to support their claims	4.0
#2c: Evidence: Ability to demonstrate detailed knowledge as evidence to support their reasons	3.66
Course Average	3.66

Rubric Description of Assessment #2 Results above:

2a: Nuance – Students obtained on average a rating between 4 and 3: (3.33)

4.0 – Their response to this assignment is reasonably complex, acknowledges and explores at least one or more contradictions about the literary period and demonstrates a very good comprehension of the text(s). Recognizes some complexity and nuance and integrates other works and/or ideas as relevant.

3.0 -- The thesis of the paper is clear, although it may be less nuanced or even fairly obvious. Essay demonstrates a somewhat simplistic, although largely correct understanding of the period and an incomplete albeit more or less sufficient comprehension of the text(s).

2b: Reasoning – Students were ranked on average a 4.0:

4.0 -- Their essay follows a logical line of reasoning to support its thesis and provides sufficient reasons (at least 4) and knowledge of the period, however not as many as optimal and, while illustrative of the period, these reasons may be less clearly designed to open up the topic in the most effective way. While discussion of some characteristics are lacking, the essay is convincing.

2c: Evidence – Students obtained an average of between 4 and 3: (3.66)

4.0 -- Claims and interpretations are logical and richly supported with well-chosen accurate textual detail, but may occasionally descend into mere summary. Use of evidence is generally sustained throughout with some gaps, subtopics may occasionally be under-developed. No irrelevant digressions.

3.0 -- Claims and interpretations about the works and period are generally backed with at least some relevant evidence, but the writer occasionally fails to indicate relevance of evidence for claim. Use of evidence is generally sustained throughout with some gaps, although subtopics may be under-developed.

Conclusions:

From these assessment results we are not only assured that all of these students have "read great works of German literature," but we have also learned that, while very few students at the beginning of the semester had much prior knowledge (if any at all) about 1.) the general chronology of literary periods, 2.) even what century they occurred in, or 3.) what authors, works or events to associate with them, almost all students at the end of the course were able to demonstrate good to very good skills in these areas. We also learned that these students apparently found #2 and #3 above more challenging than #1 and that all students enrolled made very impressive improvement in all three areas, including a more nuanced understanding of literature, even within one semester. Since all of our majors and minors are required to take this course, this assessment indicates that our graduates have not only read major literary works, but are, with few exceptions, also able to situate them in literary history.

Although our program has moved away from a literature centered program to one more focused on culture, and from a literary historical approach to a more thematic approach to teaching literature, literary periods provide students a basic and effective heuristic device for situating and structuring their knowledge of literary texts and aids them in developing an overall sense of chronology, important for any proper analysis of cultural history.

2. How will you use what you've learned from the data that was collected?

Recommendations:

As with any acquired skill or knowledge base, all students, including these in German 329, will need multiple exposures to this information in their other upper-level literature courses in

order to maintain and expand on this knowledge and continue practicing these skills. Based on this assessment information, we may want to allot at least some additional time focusing on literary history in our other more thematic literature courses as well, so that we are sure to be reinforcing, building and spreading our attention to this aspect more evenly throughout the program. We might also consider encouraging our majors and minors to enroll in the new World Cultures in the Humanities track, as general knowledge of larger world historical events will be refreshed and reinforced there, albeit in English and different cultural contexts. The German faculty plan to meet and discuss these results and hope to do the same with the Modern Language faculty at a future meeting.