

German & German Studies at St. Olaf College

Annual Newsletter

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Fall 2020

St. Olaf German welcomes new faculty!

This fall, the German Department has the pleasure of welcoming two new faculty members who bring fascinating and diverse expertises representing the breadth of German studies. We also welcome a new department chair, Kari Lie Dorer, who is chairing Norwegian, as well. Amanda Randall, meanwhile, is taking up the role of German section head.

Adrienne N Merritt

I received my Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley in German in 2018. My dissertation research looked at the writings of 13th and 14th century medieval mystics in Flanders, Germany, and the Netherlands to discuss genre formation, language choice, and the question of audience. In the last couple years, I have shifted my research focus from medieval literature to encompass a broader temporal trajectory, from German colonialism in Namibia to Afrodeutsche Hip Hop produced this year. I enjoy teaching German courses at all language levels, especially seeing students reach that aha! moment. Although I'm teaching online this Fall, I look forward to getting to know the students at St. Olaf and working together with them to develop new programming and events. I also look forward to the fairy tales course final LARP projects!



Nora Vosburg

I received my Ph.D. in German Applied Linguistics and Language Science from The Pennsylvania State University in 2020. While my research looks at language maintenance and natural acquisition

outside of the language classroom, I have also always been enthusiastic about teaching foreign languages. As a teacher of my first language German, but also a learner of different languages, I enjoy the experience of transformation that we undergo when engaging with a new language and thus new culture, as well as understanding the dynamic systems of languages. This transformation takes place from day one, so I am enjoying teaching first semester German at St. Olaf this fall and look forward to teaching Introduction to Germanic Linguistics during Interim!



Adapting Teaching to COVID-19

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has required St. Olaf faculty, students and staff alike to pivot quickly and sharply to adapt to modes of learning that also protect community health. The sudden shift to fully online teaching and learning last spring, followed by a summer spent learning new technology and best practices for online and hybrid teaching, has been both a challenge and an opportunity for the German faculty to reimagine and retool our teaching practices and materials. Each Zoom, Google Jamboards, FlipGrid and Panopto are now all part of our teaching toolkits. But, we are finding that online teaching has not necessarily hindered community building. The weekly Stammtisch via Zoom is well attended. Students are producing fantastic creative works through multimedia group projects. And, with a video-conferencing interface, we still get to see everyone's smiling faces! 😁

Student response to the challenges and opportunities associated with the “new normal” for German courses has been largely positive. Comments from our mid-semester survey include:

- “It is nice to be able to utilize [Zoom] breakout rooms to discuss class material in small groups and speak German with my classmates!”
- “Now I find myself applying German language more in my personal time, not just in the classroom.”
- “The German Department has done an excellent job in regard to providing viable courses during these confusing times. They have managed to somehow succinctly digitize themselves.”

Faculty Research

Nora Vosburg’s research focus lies primarily in heritage and minority linguistics, and in particular on bi- and trilingual speech communities in the Americas. Her approach to language contact situations combines theoretical and sociocultural perspectives. Some current or recent projects include the role of political activism as an indicator of language shift towards English among so-called Russian Mennonites in Kansas, the structure and semantics of *do*-support in the Plautdietsch variety of these same communities, the documentation of Moundridge Schweitzer German as a moribund language, and an analysis of long-distance *wh*-movement in heritage and second language grammars.

Amanda Randall continues her research on the history and historiography of German folklore studies. Her current project, based in Freiburg im Breisgau, is a community ethnography of institutional memory formation. Working in close collaboration with Freiburg folklorists, she is helping to preserve unpublished written artefacts in a private archive while analyzing the social and ethical implications of archiving itself. The focus of her analysis is a collection of letters pertaining to a controversial initiative among folklorists to document their field’s entanglements in National Socialism. Her research thus far has revealed the

significance of transnational cooperation across the political boundaries of the late Cold War period. Randall will undertake additional research visits over the next year (pandemic permitting) to support preparation of a scholarly article and an eventual book manuscript.

Adrienne Merritt focuses her research on the question of identity and cultural production. Current research projects include the expansion and revision of her dissertation into a monograph-length work tentatively entitled *Silvae Memoriae: Nature and Memory in Hadewijch of Brabant’s Visioenen*. A second major research project looks at the works of Black and Afro-German writers and artists and the question of creating space both within society and the visual and textual landscapes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Tentatively titled *Schwarz auf Weiss: Race, Memory, and Black Identity in German-Speaking Cultures*, the study employs revisions of genre and queer theories to develop new theoretical lenses to highlight the complexity and intersectional nature of Black identity expressed within the works of hip hop artists, poets, and activists in contemporary German-speaking areas.

Germanic Linguistics Course



[Illustration/Marion Deuchars]

Our new faculty member, Nora Vosburg, will offer a course on German Linguistics this Interim in collaboration with the Norwegian Department and Linguistics Program. In the quote illustrated above, Chaucer hits the nail on the head in his early observation about how words, speech, and language change over time. In this class, students

look at changes in the Germanic language family. What are the Germanic languages, why are they considered to be “a family”, and how did they change over time? While this class focuses on the Germanic language family, the engine behind language change is universal: Language is inherently social and since society changes, so does language. Students learn to apply the fundamental methods of comparative historical linguistics and sociolinguistics to analyze the development of modern Germanic languages (e.g., English, German, Norwegian, etc.) from a common ancestor and to further understand the processes underlying language change and variation. Students also learn to critically engage with linguistic scholarship through text, film, and speech data sets, and develop their research and writing skills through a project on a topic of their choosing. The German Department is thrilled to be able to offer a course that meets growing student demand for German linguistics study.

Cross-campus Connections

St. Olaf students regularly connect their German studies with their other disciplinary learning on campus. Recent German FLAC (foreign language across the curriculum) sections in the departments of education and political science, as well as in transdisciplinary English-language courses taught by German faculty make those connections explicit. But students also tell us about connections they discover on their own. Most recently, German 111 student Darby Wilson, Class of 2024, shared:

“As a student with an undecided major at St. Olaf College, I am currently pursuing a possibility of entering into the music education major. To pursue this program, a helpful class to enroll in is voice lessons. I am currently taking lessons with the wonderful Professor Karen Wilkerson. In the beginning of the semester she assigned me multiple musical works to learn, keeping in mind the new language I am pursuing. One piece, in particular, that she chose is a German song called ‘Lied der Mignon’ composed von Franz Schubert. This piece that I have been learning for the past month of the fall semester has contrasting dynamics that further the theme of the piece. For

instance, it starts off very calm and peaceful and by the second page becomes loud and assertive. The piece itself revolves around a woman who longs for the one she loves. It is a very passionate and deep work of art from the opera Mignon. As I started my journey in learning this short piece, I realized I knew many different pronunciations before beginning. Usually, when I learn music in a language foreign to my own, English, I research the pronunciations of each word. However, my experience in German 111 has given me the knowledge to understand the language of the piece I will perform. For example, before German 111, I would not have known that the word ‘weiß’ is pronounced similar to the English word ‘vice.’ With the help of German 111 I have been able to establish a connection with my music. Overall, it has been a joyful experience for me to participate in German and Music simultaneously. St Olaf college gives all of their students the opportunity to create meaningful connections across all of their interests. It is less about the individual subjects and more about how we as human beings can take our passions and meld them together to create a better you.” We in the German Department agree wholeheartedly!

German-speaking Oles

The German Department is fortunate to have not only a regular exchange student from the Universität Konstanz, but also a number of regular degree-seeking students from German-speaking countries. One such student, Fricka Lindemann, Class of 2022, has been especially active in supporting students’ German learning this year.

“Hallo! Ich bin Fricka, komme aus Berlin und bin dieses Jahr ein Junior. Ich bin zu St. Olaf gekommen, um einen neuen Kontinent kennenzulernen und "den Westen" besser zu verstehen. Letztes



Jahr sind wir mit der Deutsch-Fakultät anlässlich des Mauerfalljubiläums zu einer Veranstaltung am Germanic American Institute gefahren, wo wir auch den Botschafter von Deutschland in Chicago getroffen haben - sehr interessant! Deutsch zu lernen heißt, einen essentiellen Teil der Geschichte des Westens, seiner Kultur und Auswüchse besser verstehen zu lernen.

Featured Alumni

Bethany Guse, Class of 2016, graduated with majors in German and Russian Area Studies, as well as a Film and Media concentration. Bethany has enjoyed using her German language skills after graduation, spending two

years living in Linz, Austria teaching English through the Austrian Ministry of Education ([USTA Program](#)). At St. Olaf, she recalls being impacted by her experiences living in the German House and rooming with the German



exchange student from the University of Konstanz, who ultimately convinced her to spend a semester abroad in Konstanz. Now, Bethany lives in Madison, WI and works at the University of Wisconsin, Madison in the School of Education at [WIDA](#), where she helps develop English Language Learner assessments and tools for educators. She would love to talk to anyone interested in teaching English in Austria after graduation. ([LinkedIn](#))

Kathleen Maxwell, Class of 2017, graduated with majors in German and Environmental Science and a concentration in Management Studies. Katie



decided to major in German at St. Olaf as a way of continuing to improve her German skills and gain an excellent perspective on understanding sustainability. Her study abroad semester in Konstanz introduced her

both to the culture and coursework of German environmental sustainability, and she continues to value the skills she gained in Germany in her current life and work. Katie also credits her German study at St. Olaf for helping hone her analysis of stories, something she uses every day in her job as Communications Coordinator for [Faith in Place](#). She lives in a vibrant neighborhood in Chicago where she connects with the area's German immigrant culture through local cultural centers, theater, and food. Katie would be happy to connect with students interested in study abroad or life as a young professional ([LinkedIn](#)).

Brian Nevins, Class of 2019, graduated with majors in Physics, Mathematics and a concentration in German Studies. At St. Olaf, Brian appreciated the immersive language learning in the context of culture that he experienced in the German department. As a STEM-focused student, he appreciated Germany's historical and modern leadership in many scientific fields, but found that he most enjoyed developing an understanding for another culture and broadening his overall perspective on life that goes beyond a professional context. Brian recently finished his first year of graduate studies in his work towards a Ph.D. in Physics from Michigan State University and has been working on a summer research project studying neutron star formation.



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