

## The Department of Modern Languages and the Augsburg Mission Statement

In its memorandum of September 19, 2006, the One College Initiative asks that each Augsburg department delineate its relationships with or contributions to the four major themes of the mission statement. The Department of Modern Languages supports each theme of the mission, a commitment that is particularly apparent when viewed from our Department's base, the tradition of the liberal arts. We understand the mission of our discipline to be teaching that balances the practical, the skills-based with the intellectually liberating, the sensibilities-based.

Our Department balances practical instruction in languages other than English (LOEs) with intellectually liberating instruction in the literatures and social reflexes of the global cultures that have used those LOEs for centuries. Our integrated instruction in both world languages and world cultures gives each student the opportunity to achieve the global awareness required of each Augsburg graduate.

To our way of thinking, instruction in languages is inseparable from and impossible without instruction in global cultures. As we provide such instruction, we prepare "citizens of the world," Augsburg alums who possess a detailed understanding of both an LOE as well as the society that has long used it. Our language courses emphasize the former, our global culture courses the latter. But every Modern Languages offering strikes that demanding skills/sensibilities balance so fundamental to a liberal arts education. To insure that we stay abreast of national developments in pedagogy and to share our own insights with colleagues on other campuses, we attend professional development conferences. We have worked with colleagues across Minnesota to improve the articulation of LOE-teaching from the primary grades through the college years.

We also teach literature. And whether the subject is Cervantes or Voltaire, the biting lyric poetry of Germany's Reformation or the still contemporary tragedies of Norway's Ibsen, our class discussions take up again and again what it means to be human and how we humans should live. Students analyze the perceptions of Don Quixote; they argue the choices of Faust. We teachers foster intellectual curiosity by asking questions of great texts--not only so that our students will find the answers but so that they will learn to ask better and better questions. We are confident that once a student has learned to question, questioning itself will become a response to the world that is both engaged and critical, a dedication to learning that is both tenacious and lifelong. To keep their analytical skills sharp, faculty members who specialize in literary study publish scholarly books and articles in that field.

The Department of Modern Languages affirms the emphasis placed by the mission statement on the formative effect of Christian faith on an Augsburg education. Our Department members regularly facilitate classroom discussions of the 'other,' self-discovery and personal vocation--concepts that are fully consonant with Luther's three seminal writings of 1520. Christ's sacrifice frees us from sin, but with that freedom comes a duty to serve others; one can be a priest to oneself only if one is also a priest to one's neighbor. Our Norwegian professor has regularly given presentations to new faculty, staff, and students on the history of Augsburg Seminary and the Lutheran Free Church.

Our Department answers the call to self-discovery by challenging students to respond to the languages, art, social structures, and histories of global cultures that developed independently of the English-speaking world. As they develop an increased awareness of the complex globe they inhabit, they will better understand their place and their society's place on that globe. As they develop the more inward-directed awareness, they will also develop the

second-language skills necessary to serve neighbors who share our ever more interconnected world.

The Department's championing of intellectual and cultural egalitarianism arises not only from the heritage of the Lutheran Free Church and the works of the great writers we teach but from the most elemental underpinnings of language itself. Our linguists owe debts of insight to the proposition that there are structural principles shared by all languages, grammar reflexes innate to all humans. The much-discussed concept of "universal grammar" assumes a capacity for verbal communication and language-learning shared by us all. The capacity to produce meaningful sound as one avoids nonsensical sound is "re-discovered"—with many a smile!—in each of our first-semester classes. To keep their analytical skills sharp, faculty members who specialize in linguistics publish scholarly books and articles in that field.

Finally, our grounding in Luther's teaching and method is evident in our pedagogical reflexes: much of our class-preparation is devoted to the construction of scenarios that will occasion dialogue, not only between teacher and student but between student and student. There the emphasis is less on the right and wrong of thought and more on clarity of expression and openness to challenge.

The One College Initiative calls the Department's attention to our relationship with the Twin Cities. While our faculty agrees that we should devote more attention to and make more use of our community surroundings, we have already reached out to create ties of language and civilization. For instance, the German program worked with the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Dakotas and Minnesota to bring Holocaust survivors to campus. The Norwegian program has fostered an ongoing relationship with the Mindekirken, the Norwegian Memorial Church, and with the Norwegian Consulate General. Spanish teachers use local media as sources, maintain contacts with local Hispanic cultural organizations and take entire classes to the Mexican shops and restaurants on Lake Street. We are all working on new ideas to engage our fellow citizens in the lifelong education that Augsburg offers.

When we consider how our program is "shaped by an intentionally diverse campus community," we have to note an obvious advantage: thanks to the AugCore foreign-language requirement, we welcome students of all backgrounds represented in the College's student body. Our classes represent a kind of "academic watering hole" for Augsburg students. We are particularly pleased to welcome to language study those CLASS students who are able to join us.

We further the cause of diversity by "affirming individual differences" when we offer our classes insights into faiths, ethnicities and civilizations that differ from those of most Augsburg students. In greatest demand among our languages is Spanish, whose native speakers are overwhelmingly Catholic. The history of the Catholic Church is also intimately associated with the French- and German-speaking worlds. So our courses must present positions taken by Catholicism, Islam, and Judaism (in Spanish courses) or by Catholicism and Judaism (in French and German courses). Given the long histories, and sadly, the recent histories, of those peoples, our discussions of trends in civilization afford us many opportunities to discuss the ebb and flow of civil discourse and hate speech, of enlightened social commerce and genocide. Each of us is determined to seize those opportunities.