



# Going Global

## Pioneering Program Uses Language to Illuminate Foreign Cultures

With a federal award of \$179,000, Wittenberg's foreign language department is poised to implement one of the most distinctive and innovative language-across-the-curriculum programs in the country. The project will not only revamp foreign language curricula, it will also internationalize classes and academic programs across departments, providing new opportunities for Wittenberg students from all disciplines. When completed, it promises to be a model for liberal arts colleges everywhere.

by Gabrielle Antoniadis

Professor Tim Bennett, chair of the foreign language department, talks about language and its relationship to culture with the kind of passion many would reserve for a favorite sports team or political candidate. Leaning forward in his chair as he explains how thrilled he is about the federal grant recently awarded to the foreign language

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department, he talks about the impact it will have not only on his department, but on departments across the curriculum.

“This project will give Wittenberg the chance to truly internationalize the entire curriculum,” he says. “It gets right at the heart of what we are trying to do as an institution to prepare our students for the challenges they will face in this increasingly diverse world.”

Judging from the size of the award, it is also clear that the U.S. Department of Education, which awarded the two-year grant under its Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language (UISFL) Program, believes that Wittenberg’s proposed language-across-the-curriculum (LAC) project is exceptional. Wittenberg received every penny it requested – just a few dollars short of the program’s maximum award amount.

“With these highly competitive federal grants, it is extraordinarily unusual to get everything you ask for,” notes Gary Gaffield, former associate provost, who, with Bennett, was instrumental in putting the proposal together.

According to Bennett, the project is nothing less than a comprehensive restructuring of foreign language learning that will expand and embed the meaningful use of language in classes across the curriculum. That means

foreign language courses will have a whole new look and approach, but it also means that many courses in a variety of disciplines such as political science, computer science, history or psychology, will look different.

The first changes began this fall. Foreign language students enrolled in 200-level courses didn’t find the traditional conversation and composition courses. Instead, they chose from a new set of courses that integrate language with learning about the culture. Think *French Film and Culture*, or *Germans and Their Natural Environment*, or *Russian Contemporary Issues*. By offering a range of authentic texts and resources like film, newspaper articles, political speeches and magazine articles for study, these new courses will give students a more profound understanding of the relationship between language and culture, and ultimately, a greater appreciation of that particular culture. In the Asian languages as well, the goal will be to incorporate new concepts and texts into traditional courses so that students will eventually engage their language abilities more fundamentally in other disciplines.

That is a significant change in philosophy – it’s not just about gaining a set of language skills anymore; it’s about using language as a lens to better see and understand other cultures. And that is what phase two of this project really entails. This second phase is an ambitious effort to “globalize” courses outside of the foreign language department. Imagine a comparative politics course, for example, that offers texts relevant to the course in several different

languages. Though only one professor will teach the class, one student will be able to study course material in Japanese, another can study German materials, and still another can research Russian texts. The idea is that this kind of immersion into language brings students a unique appreciation for cultural nuances of meaning that cannot truly be gained in any other way.

In the process, foreign language students gain a deeper, truer proficiency in their language. And other students – who may never have considered learning a language – may be encouraged to explore language study. Ultimately, the goal is not to change courses in



## Project Team

- **James Allan** *Political Science*
- **Lori Askeland** *English*
- **David Barry** *German*
- **Tim Bennett** *German*
- **Howard Choy** *Chinese*
- **Amy Christiansen** *Japanese*
- **Lauren Crane** *Psychology*
- **Corwin Georges** *Theatre & Dance*
- **D. Scot Hinson** *English*
- **Ruth Hoff** *Spanish*
- **Miguel Martinez-Saenz** *Philosophy*
- **Tanya Maus** *History*
- **Nancy McHugh** *Philosophy*
- **Chris McIntyre** *Spanish*
- **Tammy Proctor** *History*
- **Eric Stahlberg** *Computational Science*
- **Leanne Wierenga** *French*
- **Tim Wilkerson** *French*
- **Molly Wood** *History*
- **Bin Yu** *Political Science*
- **Lila Zaharkov** *Russian*

other departments, but rather to create new opportunities within existing courses.

“What I hope this project will do is not only fundamentally change the way we teach language and culture, but, by giving them a more global perspective, also change how students in other disciplines begin to think about those disciplines,” Bennett says.

The beauty of the Wittenberg model – and one of the things that sets it apart from other language-across-the-

development opportunities for faculty inside and outside the foreign language department, it will also give faculty skills that will inform what they do in many of their courses. “The benefits will ramify across the university,” he says.

“This opportunity for collaboration among departments will be a kind of boon to the whole curriculum,” Bennett agrees. “We as faculty will have a chance to discuss the disciplines and how they intersect, and ask questions like ‘What are the crucial concepts that students will be working with in your course that I in language need to be aware of?’ At the same time, foreign language faculty can share insights on how a text is influenced by the culture it comes from.”

Eric Stahlberg, director of computational science, talks about the doors this project will open for students across disciplines. “The problems we face in the world, from the environment to health and medicine, can only benefit from a global perspective; this project will help our students become much stronger global collaborators by helping them communicate on a personal level with increased appreciation for other languages and cultures,” he says.

For computational science – itself a pioneering program at Wittenberg – it means students will have opportunities to do more scientific research as well as complete internships abroad. Stahlberg adds, “What I see as a real possibility is taking two areas where Wittenberg is leading and bringing them together in a way to put us even further ahead. The opportunities for growing international partnerships in science and technology are tremendous.”

Bennett sees this project as a logical extension of a foreign language program at Wittenberg, which has helped produce 10 Fulbright Award recipients since 1996 and which already attracts students with a keen interdisciplinary focus. Just this year, the foreign language department graduated two Fulbright recipients who will be English teaching assistants in Germany, Emily Heidrich and Inge Williams, as well as three students who received teaching grants from the Austrian government (Alex Kramer, Mary Beth Lintz, and Katie

Konrad). All five of these students pursued their own interdisciplinary paths and/or double majors.

“This grant is the external recognition and validation of what we have been doing here in the foreign language department for a while,” Bennett says. “And it will allow us to build on those years of work.”

According to Gaffield, since becoming chair just over a year and a half ago, Bennett has brought renewed energy, leadership and vision to Wittenberg’s efforts to internationalize the curriculum. He has been successful in uniting not only his department, but others outside the department as well. Bennett credits his entire department of creative and

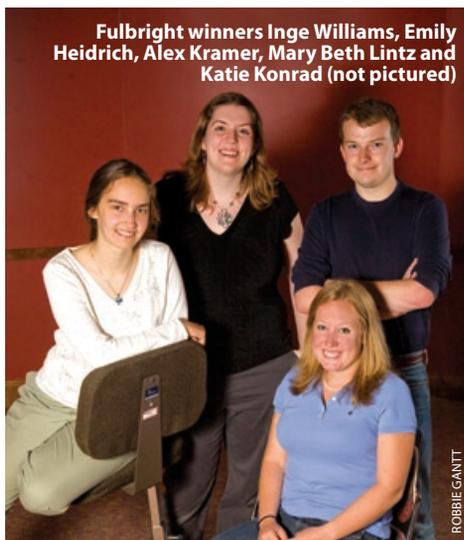
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– Gary Gaffield

committed instructors, all of whom have been concerned to see globalism take root across the curriculum and are happy to help make it happen.

Gaffield points out that Wittenberg as an institution is solidly behind this “cutting-edge work,” as demonstrated by its pledge of resources to the project. “This is a giant step forward for Wittenberg to achieve the goals we have set for ourselves in the strategic plan. If we are going to globalize the curriculum, it may be that one of the most important steps we can take is to give students facility of language and an understanding of cultures.”

It is a common refrain of the modern era: We live in a global village – a place where international borders no longer define us as they used to, and where they certainly do not limit us. Wittenberg’s innovative language-across-the-curriculum project promises to give students more than the ability to speak another language; it promises a depth of cultural awareness and insight that will make Wittenberg students better citizens of this new world. ■



Fulbright winners Inge Williams, Emily Heidrich, Alex Kramer, Mary Beth Lintz and Katie Konrad (not pictured)

curriculum programs is that the professor teaching the course will not need to have expertise in any particular language. S/he will have a core set of resources related to their discipline that have been identified by both foreign language faculty and non-foreign language faculty. This points to another unique aspect of Wittenberg’s program: the commitment of faculty from other departments to make disciplinary content integral to students’ foreign language learning experience.

And therein lies the work ahead. Over the next year, faculty from across the curriculum will decide how new and revised courses will be structured, create lists of texts to be used, and engage in an interdisciplinary reading colloquium to familiarize themselves with the concepts, themes and methods of specific disciplines. Gary Gaffield explains that this process will not only bring significant personal and professional