

Integrating computer and multimedia technology into german literature courses

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In recent years, computer technology and ease of use have advanced to a point where it is both feasible and practical to utilize new technologies not only in the teaching of language, but also in the teaching of literature. The new developments offer some advantages over the traditional classroom format by providing an extended forum and more time for multifaceted discussions of the texts along with their cultural and historical contexts.

This paper will describe some examples of the integration of computer and multimedia technology into a course which introduces third-year undergraduates to the study of German literature and culture. I have taught this course before in the traditional format and am currently preparing materials for the multimedia version which will be offered for the first time from January to May 1996. Since I have not yet offered the course in this new format, this abstract can only outline the approach and procedures which I have been devising this fall. Results and conclusions based on student achievements and their reactions to the incorporation of computer technology in a foreign language literature course will be included in the final version of the paper next May.

Implementation: Student assignments are being designed to encourage written and oral discussion based on multimedia presentations, listserv activities, e-mail exchanges, and the use of German Studies resources on the World Wide Web. All students in the class will have access to a German Literature and Culture Listserv and to selected German resources which I will make available on the University of Arizona German Studies Homepage and my personal homepage. I am currently expanding both of these WWW homepages.

For class presentations I will use selected visual materials scanned from German books, newspapers, magazines, and exhibition catalogs, as well as excerpts from audio and video recordings. These materials include texts, images, audio and video

clips on German writers, artists, actors, philosophers and musicians (e.g. Albrecht Drer, Martin Luther, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Friedrich Nietzsche, Richard Wagner, Thomas Mann, Richard Strauss, Max Reinhardt, Marlene Dietrich, Franz Kafka, Bertolt Brecht, Kurt Weill, etc.).

One of the goals of "computerizing" this course is to encourage student discussion about German literature and its cultural context outside of as well as within the classroom by means of the "German Literature and Culture Listserv." Students will also be encouraged to search the Internet for archives and discussion lists on particular topics relevant to the class readings and discussion, and to share this information with all members of the class. Students will develop and practice efficient search techniques for finding the most relevant documents and other materials in a limited amount of time.

Example of Specific Activities:

Each student will be asked to write a short essay in German (about 2-3 pages long) on a specific German literature/culture topic and post it via e-mail to the German 302 listserv. Each class member will be required to read three of these essays and send short reader commentaries (about 1/2 page each written either in German or English) to the authors. Students will bring print-outs of their essays and commentaries to class for further discussion, and then rewrite them before giving them (or posting them) to the teacher for evaluation by a specific date. Use of the listserv will hopefully encourage students to communicate with each other and the instructor outside of the classroom at their own pace and according to their own time-schedules. This approach motivates students to learn and write for each other rather than solely for the instructor, and should result in more dynamic and informed discussions during class. This assignment counts as a regular composition assignment, and each student is evaluated on his/her essay and three commentaries as rewritten after class discussion.

Evaluation of the Multimedia Literature and Culture Course

1. By Students: In the middle and at the end of each semester, students will be asked to compare their experience in this multimedia German course with other literature and culture courses which they have taken at the University of Arizona. Part I of the evaluation form will ask them specific questions; Part II will ask for their general evaluation and any comments they may have about the course.

2. By Instructor: Having taught this course before

in the traditional format, I will have a solid basis for comparing the quality of the German essays, exams, discussions and group work in the multimedia version with previous offerings of the course. I am currently establishing evaluation criteria and designing an evaluation form.

Until now, most computer-aided instruction in foreign language departments has been almost wholly devoted to the teaching of language. My paper will describe and evaluate innovations in the application of computer and multimedia technology to the teaching of literature and culture in foreign languages.