

German Culture and Conversation  
A Continuing Education Course  
Rita Rowand-Lord Fairfax Community College

## DEFINITION

German Conversation and Culture is an approach to learning language which encompasses German vocabulary, phrases, commands and questions encountered in practical and informal settings such as traveling, shopping and dining. It is not a study of grammar or verb conjugation but focuses on pragmatic use of the language and acquiring interactive language skills.

This course is also an exploration of German customs, culture and habits and how they differ from those in the United States. Culture is defined as a particular form of civilization, especially its beliefs, customs, arts and institutions (Webster, 1996). Actual situations and scenarios will be examined to comprehend the background and basis of particular customs and beliefs.

## RATIONALE

German is spoken not only in Germany, but also Austria, parts of Switzerland, Holland, Eastern Europe, the Ukraine and small enclaves in Russia and Africa. Germans have a strong presence in the Western Hemisphere, economically and culturally. Therefore, it is probable that many U.S. citizens will have contact, directly or indirectly, with Germans and their culture. American universities have study abroad agreements in a wide variety of academic areas with German universities for students who can communicate in German.

Culture learning is the process of acquiring the culture-specific and culture-general knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for effective communication and interaction with individuals from other cultures. It is a dynamic, developmental, and ongoing process, which engages the learner cognitively, behaviorally and affectively. (Jorstad & Paige, 1995)

According to the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (1999), the study of a foreign language does two things:

1. Broadens one's perspective and understanding of the world
2. Increases one's ability to interact with people of different backgrounds and culture

Additionally, globalization and modern technological advances have made it possible to shrink distances to a keystroke and allow people to work and interact internationally. Business organizations in Germany are our Western partners and interact with Americans on an on-going basis. Business and personal interaction is enhanced with language familiarity. The United States is the largest investor in Germany. (Stark, 1997)

According to the 1990 census, 57.4 million, or one in four Americans are of German heritage. Comprehending cultural attributes and the language can strengthen one's knowledge of his or her background and family history.

These reasons all describe how language learning can enhance an individual's experiences, increase knowledge and help assimilate cultural differences into their own microcosm. Our world is growing smaller by the increased capabilities of technological advances; consequently foreign borders are becoming more accessible to the general population.

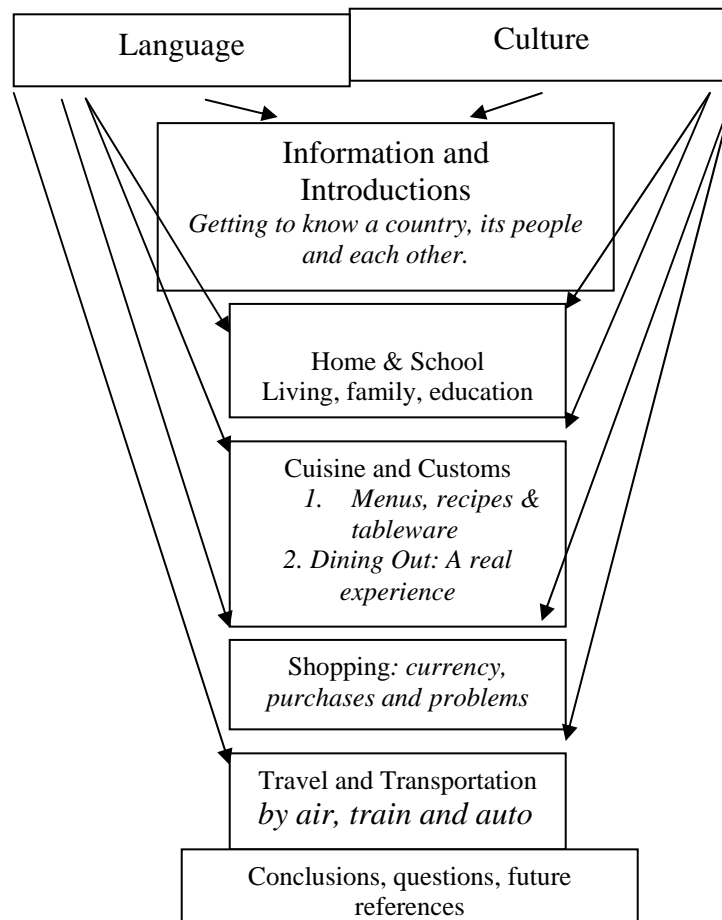
### CONTENT SOURCE

Leisure activity will be the source of the content of this Continuing Education curriculum. The common body of knowledge is the German language, more specifically *hochdeutsch* or High German. Idioms, slang and "Anglicized" terms are recognized from current periodicals and texts.

Cultural information will be drawn from German society and personal experiences of the instructor and the students. The use of anecdotal readings and German Internet sites will be used to augment texts and personal accounts.

### CONTENT STRUCTURE

#### German Conversation and Culture



## AIMS

This curriculum aims for students to achieve an understanding of written and spoken words and phrases, for use in business or pleasure, when communicating with German speakers.

Additionally, this course aims for students to gain knowledge of the similarities and the cultural differences that exist between the United States and Germany and to increase multi-cultural sensitivity.

## GOALS

Upon completion of the course students will:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the German language studied and their own.
2. Identify written and spoken phrases and sentences on various topics of a pragmatic nature, such as exchanging currency, ordering a train ticket or choosing an item from a German menu.
3. Increase awareness of cultural differences and how they manifest themselves.
4. Expand curiosity to learn more about language and cultural study
5. Link English with German words to form basic comprehension techniques in a foreign language.

## RESOURCES

Jorstad, H., Paige, M., Siaya L., Klein F., Colby, J. (1995)., *Culture Learning in Language Education: A Review of the Literature* University of Minnesota, Center for Advanced Research and Language Acquisition (CARLA)

Paige, M., (1999). *Culture and Language Learning Initiatives*, University of Minnesota, Center for Advanced Research and Language Acquisition

Stark, J., (1997), *Is German Germane?*, Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy  
<http://www.imsa.edu/edu/forlang/gr/grreasons.html>

*Websters II New Riverside Dictionary*, Revised Edition, (1996). Boston: Houghton Mifflin

## SCOPE and SEQUENCE

German Culture and Conversation is a six-week continuing education course at the community college. Each session is ninety minutes long and includes five topics.

1. **Topic One:** Information and Introductions, the land and its people (one week)
  - Geographical, cultural information about Germany and the customs of its people
  - Getting to know each other
2. **Topic Two:** Home, Family and School (one week)
  - The family life and environment
  - The education system
3. **Topic Three-**Customs and Cuisine (two weeks)
  - Menus, recipes and tableware
  - Customs and practices
  - Dining out: A real experience (second meeting)
4. **Topic Four-**Shopping and commerce (one week)
  - Currency and purchasing
  - Exchanges, and problem solving
5. **Topic Five-**Travel and Transportation (one week)
  - By air, rail and automobile
  - Dealing with emergencies
  - Conclusions, questions and future plans

## **UNIT 1**

### **Information and Introductions: Germany, A Land and its People**

#### **GOALS**

1. Synthesize ethnographic and geographical knowledge about Germany
2. Analyze the concept of culture through comparisons of German and American customs and traits
3. Increase interpersonal communication skills with German speaking people

#### **RATIONALE**

A deeper understanding of a country and its people fosters a desire to study its language. By delving into the meaning of culture one begins to comprehend the scope and complexity of a set of people in a country different from our own. Basic terms of greeting are the most rudimentary forms of communication and are most frequently used with initial contact of new people. With this knowledge, interaction is promoted. Learning about Germany, its language and also about their peers, students become a more integrated part of the globalized world that they now live in.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

1. Identify geographical characteristics about Germany
2. Demonstrate comprehension of the meaning and relevancy of culture
3. Interpret written and spoken German terms of introduction
4. Gain competency in using German phrases of greeting
5. Recognize the distinctive viewpoints of German customs when first meeting

#### **ACTIVITIES**

1. Review map of Germany(Lonely Planet, 2002) and view PowerPoint, “Germany: Land, Language and Culture”
2. Discuss what culture means and have students give examples
3. Review handout on “What is culture?” (CARLA Institute, 1999)
4. Read together worksheet, “Out and About in Hamburg.” (Kothe, 1992)

5. Students introduce themselves in German and tell why they are taking the course, then role-play: Meeting and greeting scenarios.

6. Discuss customs and how they differ from the U.S., when meeting someone German. Read aloud "Greetings and Common Courtesies." (Flippo, 1997)

### REFERENCES

*Culture and Language Learning: What is Culture?* (1999) University of Minnesota, National Language Resource Center, CARLA Institute, pp 1-2

<http://carla.acad.umn.edu/culture.html>

Flippo, H., *The German Way*, (1997), pp. 66-67, Lincolnwood, Ill. NTC Publishing Group

Kothe, J., *Get by in German*. (1992), pp7-9, London, BBC Books

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/mapshells/europe/germany/germany.htm>

## UNIT 2

### Home, Family and School System

#### GOALS

1. Acquire knowledge of German language terms about the home and family
2. Comprehend how the German school system operates and how it differs from the U.S.

#### RATIONALE

The foundation of a Western society is the family. The family and its home environment are something everyone can identify with. Learning the language and characteristics of the home, family and school is an essential starting point for students. Education is a highly valued element of society in Germany and the United States, and therefore worth close examination and comparison.

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. Recognize German terms and descriptions of family members and domestic items
2. Design and label simple blueprint of house in Germany
3. Identify strengths and weaknesses of German school system
4. Compare German and American educational traits

## **ACTIVITIES**

1. Draw a collective or generic family tree on the board and identify German terms of its components.
2. Questions and answers about student's family members. (use diagram of family tree as needed) Ex: Do you have a \_\_\_\_\_?(-son, nephew, etc.)
3. Examine magazine, "*Schoener Wohnen*" (Living Beautifully) and vocabulary list of home elements and design dream home as assignment for next week.
4. Read together two handouts on German education: "The ABC's of the German School System", (vanHooven, 2001) and "The German Higher Education System" (Oehler, 2002) and discuss how it is different from the US. E-mail the author, S. van Hooven or other sources provided about the German school system.
5. Interact with guest speaker, German exchange student (current Lord Fairfax Community College student)

## **REFERENCES**

Oehler, E., *The German Higher Education System*, (2002), pp. 1-4, Goethe Institute  
<http://www.goethe.de/kug/buw/stu/ein/enindex.htm>

vanHooven, S., *The ABC's of the German School System*, (2001), pp.1-5  
[http://www.expatica.com/germanymain.asp?pad=202,222,&item\\_id=9598](http://www.expatica.com/germanymain.asp?pad=202,222,&item_id=9598)



**UNIT 3**  
**Dining Out: German Cuisine and Customs**  
**(Two weeks )**

**GOALS**

1. Identify key items and phrases used in German restaurants.
2. Become aware of customs and the culture surrounding food and mealtimes.

**RATIONALE**

The dining experience of another country is particularly enhanced and enriched when foreign words and customs are understood, both abroad and at home. Not only is socialization improved but also a better understanding of the Germanic people is forged.

Students are able to acquire new interests such as German cooking, eating at German restaurants or perhaps planning a trip due to this knowledge and experience. They may even choose to host an exchange student or participate in cultural exchange experiences through this added knowledge.

**OBJECTIVES**

1. Communicate in a language other than English (German) in regard to food.
2. Examine cultural differences in dining between Americans and Germans by identifying particular customs and traits used by Germans in relation to their cuisine.
3. Recognize the most common terms on a German menu.
4. Recite terms on a menu including ordering and requesting items in a restaurant.
5. Analyze German recipes to create a German dish of student's choice.
6. Utilize German words in a practical setting: In a German restaurant and with German natives.

### ACTIVITIES

1. Review handout of vocabulary list; then practice pronunciation and use of words  
Key Words and Phrases: Ordering, Breakfast, At a café, Dinner, At the Restaurant  
(Kothe, 1992)
2. Arrange a table with place settings on which all items are labeled. Point and have students repeat.
3. Role-playing at table. Take turns having pairs interact with table items, cutlery, etc.
4. Show examples of German foods available in the U.S. Sample and discuss.
5. Discuss German customs in dining. Use handout *Kulture Korner* (Crean, Scott and Briggs, 1993, pp. 310-326) with compilation of differences in customs and traditions. Include customary time of meals, and use of cutlery. (Flippo, 1997)
6. Present sample menus for review. (<http://www.rhodannenberg.ch/d/Restau/D2.html>)  
Students read aloud various selections and discuss how they are different from our American menus and items. Questions and answers on special situations such as how dining requirements are accommodated and, for example, is a children's menu common practice in Germany?
7. Practice role-playing at the dinner table with menus, with someone acting as waiter.
8. Read together examples of Germanic cookbooks and discuss differences in measurements, ingredients, etc. Give handout of recipes. ([www.daskochrezept.com.de/](http://www.daskochrezept.com.de/))

**Second week:** Go to German restaurant and practice uses of the terms learned. Listen to tape in the car on the way, "Eating Out". (Kothe, 1992 Cassette A)

ASSIGNMENT: Practice using a German recipe and bring a sample to class the following week.

### REFERENCES

American Association of Teachers of German, GROW Committee (2002). Learning Scenarios. [http://grow.aatg.org/vol\\_2-2/learning\\_scenarios/scenario\\_pages/essen.html](http://grow.aatg.org/vol_2-2/learning_scenarios/scenario_pages/essen.html)

Crean, Jr., J., Scott, M., & Briggs, J., (1993). *Deutsche Sprache und Landeskunde*. (pp. 310-326). New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.

Flippo, H., (1997). *The German Way Aspects of Behavior, Attitudes, and Customs in the German-Speaking World*. (pp. 9-10, 15-16, 35-38) Lincolnwood, Ill.: NTC Publishing Group.

i12.de (2001) Recipes. <http://www.daskochrezept.de/rezepte>

Koethe, J., (1992). *Get By in German*. London: BBC Enterprises, Ltd. Video pack and handbook.

<http://www.rhodannenberg.ch/d/Restau/D2.html>

## **UNIT 4** **Shopping and Commerce**

### **GOALS**

1. Demonstrate understanding and characteristics of foreign currencies.
2. Utilize German terms when experiencing purchasing transactions.

### **RATIONALE**

As the old saying goes, “Money makes the world go ‘round !”

Purchasing items unique to another land is of great interest and pleasure to many visitors of foreign countries. Comprehending the logistics and necessary language used in commerce makes those tasks more comfortable and successful, whether for business or pleasure. Learning this information also helps individuals to feel more in control of the process if they know some of the language and customs unique to the country.

### **OBJECTIVES**

1. Calculate value of fluctuating Euro and how it is used.
2. Demonstrate comprehension of German shopping customs.
3. Communicate throughout the completion of transactions in purchasing.

### ACTIVITIES

1. Examine periodicals, such as the *Wall Street Journal* and discuss rate of exchange
2. Discuss shopping in Germanic countries and the customs related to these activities.
3. Review vocabulary and phrases for shopping: clothing, food, general items.  
(Crean, Scott, Briggs, 1993)
4. Role play “at the store”. Divide into two areas, then reverse: Shoppers and shopkeepers. Have items displayed and priced, use Euros and have students use a shopping bag to make purchases, exchanges, and returns.

### REFERENCES

Crean, Jr., J., Scott, M., & Briggs, J., (1993). *Deutsche Sprache und Landeskunde*. (pp. 148-151). New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc.

### UNIT 5 Travel and Transportation

#### GOALS

1. Evaluate modes of transportation to Europe and within individual countries.
2. Communicate in German while navigating within a German speaking country.
3. Gain knowledge about rail transportation in Europe

#### RATIONALE

Travel to and from a foreign country as well as upon arrival requires specialized skills. Knowing some practical information regarding making these arrangements and knowing the basic language terms that are useful throughout one’s travels can make the entire experience more pleasant and seamless.

More specifically, traveling by train is the most common way of getting around Europe. The opposite is true in America. Many Americans have never experienced train travel until they get to Europe. There are many details about train travel which are entirely new to Americans, but essential in order to make reservations and reach a destination in Europe. This pragmatic information can save time and increase efficiency to the arriving visitor of a European country.

### OBJECTIVES

1. Appraise transportation options to the foreign destination.
2. Extract information from travel websites to obtain best value for transportation.
3. Demonstrate capability to read train codes and schedule for rail travel.
4. Recognize German travel terms and how they are used.
5. Attain knowledge of resources available when encountering an emergency.

### ACTIVITIES

1. Review list of travel websites and gather best information on various travel options. Students will plan trip they would eventually wish to take as final project. (see student evaluations Discuss future plans and aspirations for travel.
2. Review: "Traveling with the German Railroad: Deutsche Bahn (DB)", ([www.businessgerman.com](http://www.businessgerman.com), 2002) and "Rail Travel Tips" ([www.german-way.com](http://www.german-way.com), 1998) including diagram of train.
3. View film "All's Well in Rothenburg"  
([http://www.germanvideo.com/travel/trav\\_desc\\_a-b.html#tr1040](http://www.germanvideo.com/travel/trav_desc_a-b.html#tr1040))
4. Powerpoint(interact.) on vocabulary and phrases for making inquiries or requesting help.
5. Identify components of Eurail maps in computer lab and use ([raileurope.com](http://raileurope.com), 2002) with train routes. List questions asked at the information center of the rail station and practice them with a partner in English or German.
6. Role play: "in the dining car of the train" to practice new terms and review previous ones from dining unit. Students may use vocabulary list.
7. Ques.& answers on entire course, expectations, future interests.

**REFERENCES**

Flippo, H., (online supplement to *The German Way*), (1998), *Rail Travel Tips*, pp. 1-5

[www.german-way.com/german/railupd.html](http://www.german-way.com/german/railupd.html)

Schaupp, G., & Graff, J.,(2002), pp. 1-4, Language Institute TREFFPUNKT, Bamberg

[www.businessgerman.com/business-knigge/11-travelling-by-train.html](http://www.businessgerman.com/business-knigge/11-travelling-by-train.html)

[http://www.germanvideo.com/travel/trav\\_desc\\_a-b.html#tr1040](http://www.germanvideo.com/travel/trav_desc_a-b.html#tr1040) (to order films)

<http://www.raileurope.com/us/help/index.htm>

**STUDENT EVALUATION (Sample 1)**

Please complete the following:

Describe the topics that were of most interest to you and explain why.

Which activities do you think were most relevant and in what circumstances would you have opportunities to use the related information?

Explain your concept of culture. Has it differed since taking this course or increased awareness in any related areas?

Are there other topics that you would like to see covered in a future language course?

Has your interest in learning a language : (circle one)

- a. remained about the same
- b. increased throughout this course
- c. decreased since completing the course
- d. unsure

### **Final Project (Optional\*) Sample 2**

Plan a trip you would like to take; include:

1. When would you go, how you would get there, and how much it will cost?
2. Where will you go when you arrive, which cities, geographic areas? How will you travel between these points.
3. Describe a perfect meal you might experience.
4. What kind of things will you see and do?
5. What kind of unique things do you hope to buy? What is today's exchange rate?

E-mail this information to me at [rrowand@odu.edu](mailto:rrowand@odu.edu) and I will critique it and make recommendations, and send it back to you.

\* This project is optional because it would be completed after the course is over and because the course is non-credit and without a grade. It is for the enrichment of the student and to see how they can apply some of the specialized information they learned.



## DOCUMENT VALIDATION

This curriculum should be assessed by several German language teachers. I am contacting three professors with whom I have some contact. All are heads of their departments and hopefully will have good suggestions for this curriculum. Dr. Wendell Frye was my advisor and frequent professor during my undergraduate studies in German. Dr. Ronald Horwege was the host of a conference I recently attended and both are very active in promoting the study of German. Additionally, Dr. Lubich is the head of the Dept. of Foreign Languages at Old Dominion University.

Also Holly Williams, the Director of Workforce Training and Continuing Education at Lord Fairfax Community College will receive a copy of the curriculum for review and to judge appropriateness for the Continuing Education program.

Letters with curriculum and questionnaire will go to:

Dr. Ronald Horwege  
Professor of German  
Sweet Briar College  
Sweet Briar, Va. 24595

Dr. Wendell Frye  
Professor of German  
Hartwick College  
Oneonta, N.Y. 13452

Dr. Frederick Lubich  
Professor of German  
Old Dominion University  
Norfolk, Va. 23529-0085

Ms. Holly Williams  
Director of Workforce and Continuing Education  
Lord Fairfax Community College  
6480 College St.  
Warrenton, Va. 20187

**SAMPLE LETTER**

Dr. Wendell Frye  
Professor of German  
Hartwick College  
Oneonta, New York 13452

Dear Dr. Frye:

As a current graduate student hoping to eventually teach German at our local community college, I have developed a curriculum for the Continuing Adult Education program of Lord Fairfax Community College. The development of this curriculum is part of a course I am taking, and requires some expert critiquing. The curriculum is entitled, "German Conversation and Culture."

I am wondering if you would kindly review my curriculum and make any suggestions and recommendations. I hope eventually to adapt parts of this curriculum for credit courses at the college when my Masters degree is completed.

I have attached a survey as well as a copy of the curriculum to assist you in your assessment. Please feel free to let me know of any corrections, suggestions or additions you might have. You may contact me at [rrowand@odu.edu](mailto:rrowand@odu.edu) if you have any questions.

Thank you very much for your time and assistance.

Mit freundlichen Gruessen,

Rita Hemmerich Rowand  
P.O. Box 84  
Orlean, Va. 20128

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**SURVEY****(circle one)**

1. Is the definition of "German Conversation and Culture" adequately explained? Y N  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Is the rationale for the study of this program area clearly defined, reasonable and of sound basis? Y N  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Does the structure of the content develop logically and evolve from simple to more complex? Y N  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Are the topics of each unit suitable for an adult continuing education course? Y N  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Are the aims of the course appropriate and sufficient for adults in a non-credit course? Y N  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Are the overall goals of this course long-term in nature and reflect the direction that the curriculum works? Y N  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

7. Does the content reflect the process of gaining useful information and integrating related activities? Y N  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Are the unit goals sufficient for each topic and also lead to the overall aims and goals? Y N  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

9. Are there any units you would suggest be omitted or new topics, which would be more suitable in view of each unit's rationale? Y N  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

10. Does the complete curriculum reflect cohesion, balance and consistency? Y N  
**Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_

Other Suggestions: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_