Spotlight on Faculty Research

In addition to their teaching responsibilities, the Faculty of the German Department stay on the cutting edge of research in the field of German Studies. Here is an overview of their recent and current work.

THOMAS PFAU
Alice Mary Baldwin Professor of English, Chair of the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures

Some of my current research for the past year or so has involved writing and lecturing on issues related to the publication of my third monograph (Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge), which appeared from the University of Notre Dame Press in 2013.

Since its publication, there have been several web forums on the book, most recently at Syndicate Theology, which also involved my writing formal responses. An offshoot of the book is a long essay on the concept of tradition (due out in the Edinburgh Critical History of Nineteenth-Century Theology next year).

I’ll also be attending special seminar discussions on the book at the AAR (American Academy of Religion) next month and at the University of St. Thomas in Minneapolis next February. – Concurrently, I am moving ahead with research for my next book project, which will explore the role of images and image-consciousness as a type of non-propositional knowledge in literature, philosophy, and theology.

So far, I’ve sketched some of the stakes of that project in two essays, one on the visual poetics of Gerard Manley Hopkins (“Rehabilitating the Image”) and another one focused on the relationship between visuality, attention, and action (“Varieties of non-propositional Knowledge”). The latter is to be part of a collection of essays on the concepts of Judgment and Action that is currently under review. The same topic has also been at the heart of a graduate seminar (“Theological Aesthetics of the Image”) that I taught in 2014 and will be offering once more in the Fall of 2016.

INGEBORG WALThER
Associate Professor of the Practice

My work is motivated by a desire to bring together research in literary studies, second language acquisition, and pedagogy. Although these fields have been traditionally viewed as separate disciplines with differing foundational questions and methodologies, their interdisciplinary thrust has been converging on some central common issues: the construction and acquisition of language,
LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

I am writing just a few months into my first semester as department chair. This new academic year finds our department in a much strengthened position, as a result of the successful faculty searches from last spring. That happy outcome was the fruit of a strong collaborative spirit both within the department and beyond; and I begin by extending words of thanks to many colleagues in Arts & Sciences. First, we are most grateful to Laura Lieber for her conscientious and effective stewardship during the transitional 2014-15 academic year, and for her wonderful support and assistance with the faculty recruitment process that has brought us Stefani Engelstein and Henry Pickford as new colleagues. That process also benefited greatly from the efforts of Bryan Gilliam (Music), Martin Eisner (Romance Languages), Kristine Stiles (Art & Art History), and Eric Downing (German-UNC).

Already Stefani Engelstein has tackled the complex and pivotal role of co-DGS, while also serving as co-director of the Dissertation Colloquium. Likewise, Henry Pickford has taken on the Works in Progress series, is assisting with a faculty search in another department, and is actively involved in the Future of the Discipline initiative that will bring several literary studies faculty to Duke for a one-day conference on December 4th. Furthermore, I am most grateful to Kata Gellen for her skillful and dedicated administrative work as DUS, to Jakob Norberg as Academic Director of Duke in Berlin, and to Susanne Freytag as Director of the Berlin Summer Program.

As always, the success of our undergraduate program crucially depends on the dedicated and constructive participation of our graduate teaching assistants in the language program, as well as in other curricular and extra-curricular projects that allow our small but vibrant academic community to have disproportionately wide and positive impact on Duke’s undergraduate community. I look forward to seeing you at the various functions and meetings of the department and to doing everything in my power to advance the intellectual and pedagogical mission of our department and its various programs.

-- Thomas Pfau

MORE ON FACULTY RESEARCH
FROM COVER

knowledge, and culture; the nature of (national, cultural) identity (racial, gendered) identity formation; and the pedagogical project of cultural literacy.

My research explores recent conceptual models of language acquisition that view language development in terms of complex, nonlinear systems that emphasize the relationality of individual learners, social contexts, and cultural frameworks. These investigations have provided a framework for my curricular and pedagogical work, which is linked to questions of what it means to be literate or educated in a world which must deal with the multiple tensions created by rapidly expanding technologies, demographic change, and globalization.

Most recently, I have renewed a long-held interest in the intersections of poetry and music, in particular the energe of German art songs (Lieder), as well as in modern German theater. I continue to explore ways in which these art forms can systematically teach the cultural narratives in a way that brings the past into productive relationship with the present, sensitizes students to the aesthetic and symbolic qualities of language, develops their interpretative and creative capacities, and deepens their intercultural understandings.

LAURA LIEBER
Associate Professor of Religion and Germanic Languages and Literatures

I was lucky enough to receive two prestigious fellowships for this academic year: one from the National Humanities Center, where I am in residence as a fellow; and another from the American Council of Learned Societies. Thanks to these awards, I am able to spend the entire academic year on research leave, working on two interrelated projects. My primary project is a book called Staging the Sacred: Orchestration Holiness in Late Antiquity. In Staging the Sacred, Liturgical poems representing the major cultural centers of the Late Ancient world (ca. 4th-7th centuries CE) and the major religious traditions of the time (Christian, Jewish, and Samaritan) are examined through the lenses of rhetoric, performance theory, and theater studies.

Audience engagement provides a common frame of reference for these works, despite their significant differences in textual sources, attitudes towards Scripture, understandings of history, and other cultural, ethical, and political traditions.

Continued on page 6

CATCHING UP: EMMA WOELK

Emma Woelk graduated from the Carolina-Duke Graduate Program in German Studies in spring 2015. Now she is an Assistant Professor of German at St. Edward’s University in Texas.

DG: Could you tell us about your position as Assistant Professor of German at St. Edward’s University? What are your teaching, research, and service responsibilities?

EW: Teaching is definitely my main responsibility at St. Edward’s. I’ll generally be teaching a 3-4 course load. This semester I’m teaching two sections of German I and one section of German II. Next semester I expect to teach two sections of German II, one section of German IV and an English-language seminar.

There is, however, also the expectation that I’ll be active in university service and continue my research. Service is relatively light here in the first year. Usually all faculty members have undergraduate advisers who they meet with throughout the semester, but this isn’t something that is expected of new faculty.

Right now I’m working to revamp our department website and helping to get a German Club up and running.

I also have a folder on my desktop for an article I’d like to write. With grading and planning and learning how to use a new learning management system, however, I haven’t been opening this folder very frequently. But it’s on my to-do list!

DG: What has been the biggest surprise, as you transition from graduate school to your position at St. Edward’s?

EW: I don’t think I was surprised by any one thing in particular, except possibly my own preparedness to teach three courses, which I owe to Tim Wegel and the excellent models I had in graduate school.

DG: What has been the most rewarding part of your experience at St. Edward’s so far?

EW: I like being part of the community at a smaller school and seeing students get excited about extracurricular activities, like starting a German club or a reading/writing group. It’s also exciting to have students sign up for a German minor (we don’t have a major), because it means they’re learning something, they’re enjoying it and I’m not doing a terrible job.

DG: Do you have any advice for graduate students as they prepare to transition from graduate school to a faculty position?

EW: Do you mean for particular graduate students or as a group? Just kidding. I don’t think I have enough distance to answer that. If I had more time in graduate school, I think I would ask to sit in on my favorite professors’ undergraduate classes more.

In October and November, Duke German celebrated 25 years of German unity during the annual Triangle German Campus Weeks.

Sponsored by the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Washington, DC, the event was an exciting example of the on-going collaboration between the German departments at Duke University, UNC-Chapel Hill, and NC State.

Professors Corinna Kahlke, Priscilla Layne, and Michelle Bley of Duke, UNC, and NC State respectively, organized a series of films, lectures, and workshops to explore the experience of minority groups in unified Germany.

All of these events helped students think about how the unification of Germany affected a wide variety of people.

Highlights included a creative writing workshop with author Michael Götting; a reading from his debut novel Contrapunctus; and a video installation entitled “Becoming Afro-German” by producer and director Karina Griffith.

German Campus Weeks concluded with a party on November 9, the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Students and faculty gathered to commemorate the unification of Germany and to celebrate another successful year of German Campus Weeks.
Most challenging German course that I have taken. Many days we had to do impromptu presentations in class, or carried out long conversations. By constantly pushing me to speak and think in German, the class improved my German more than any other course I have taken.

DD: What is the best part of being German Club President?

DG: I have enjoyed being a part of German club over the past couple of years because it provides a safe environment for students of any level of German to come and practice speaking the language. As German Club President, I look to continue this tradition by encouraging people to participate in activities that promote speaking in German and to get people more interested in using their German outside the classroom.

DG: What kinds of activities is the German Club planning for the spring semester?

DD: We are, of course, continuing the tradition of Kaffeestunde and Kinoabend, but will also be trying to add additional cultural events throughout the semester.

DG: Describe your Duke in Berlin experience in three words.

DD: Rewarding (Being in Germany, even for the short time that I was there, helped me appreciate the language and the culture more than I could have ever imagined.)

Most challenging German course that I have taken. Many days we had to do impromptu presentations in class, or carried out long conversations. By constantly pushing me to speak and think in German, the class improved my German more than any other course I have taken.

DD: What is the best part of being German Club President?

DG: I have enjoyed being a part of German club over the past couple of years because it provides a safe environment for students of any level of German to come and practice speaking the language. As German Club President, I look to continue this tradition by encouraging people to participate in activities that promote speaking in German and to get people more interested in using their German outside the classroom.

DD: What kinds of activities is the German Club planning for the spring semester?

DG: Describe your Duke in Berlin experience in three words.

DD: Rewarding (Being in Germany, even for the short time that I was there, helped me appreciate the language and the culture more than I could have ever imagined.)

Get Involved with the Fun!

Become a German Club Leader

We are currently looking for motivated students interested in taking on leadership roles within the German Club.

Meet other students interested in German and be a part of planning the German cultural activities YOU want to attend!

Gain experience organizing events to expand your CV/resume.

Please email the German Club Advisors, Claire Scott (claire.scott@duke.edu) and Bethany Bowen-Wefuan (bethany.bowen@duke.edu) for more information.

ANNOUNCING:

Undergraduate Senior Thesis Summer Research Grant

Travel to Germany during the summer and prepare to write your senior thesis!

We are pleased to announce a new grant program for juniors. With generous support from the Dean of Trinity College, three German majors will receive travel grants of up to $3000 to conduct research in Germany for one month during the summer prior to the senior year. This research should be integrally connected to a senior honors thesis that will likely be completed during the spring term of the senior year, though an earlier timeline is also possible. Projects eligible for such funding support may be a continuation of ideas and projects developed during a study abroad semester in Berlin. Alternatively, they may involve pursuing a project formulated independently and concerned with some aspect of German culture, art, or society.

Application Process:

Students must have filled out the necessary paperwork for a senior thesis project (tentative research plan, advisor, etc.) by the time of application. The paperwork can be found here:

http://trinity.duke.edu/sites/trinity.duke.edu/files/degree-requirements/German-Graduation%20with%20Distinction.pdf

Students must submit a 2-page description of the research they intend to conduct and how it will contribute to their thesis.

Students must submit a detailed budget.

Applications will be due February 1 of the students’ junior year.

They should be sent to the DUS in German, Kata Gellen (kata.gellen@duke.edu)

Applications will be considered by a selection committee of German Department faculty.
By examining these poems through this variety of innovative lenses, I am able to contextualize these poems in the complex and dynamic world of Late Antiquity and bring Jewish, Christian, and Samaritan literature into the wider conversations surrounding cultural transformation at this pivotal time in the history of the West.

My second project, entitled Songs from the Western Shore, offers annotated translations and essays of a body of poetry written in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic (also dating from the 4th-7th centuries CE), accompanied by explanatory essays. This project will bring a beautiful but otherwise essentially inaccessible body of literature to a much wider audience in Religious and Classical Studies.

I am intrigued by methods and figures that circulate among literature, the life- and human-sciences, and proximate disciplines from the mid-eighteenth through early twentieth centuries, particularly in the Enlightenment and Romantic periods.

The book I am currently completing, Sibling Action: The Genealogical Structure of Modernity, provides a theory of the sibling across fields, as a boundary figure within epistemological systems. In the long nineteenth century, genealogy became a dominant methodology for organizing knowledge.

The nineteenth-century obsession with origins is well-known, but the genealogical method also transformed contemporary terms in evolving historical systems—whether languages, religions, races, nations, species, or subjects—into siblings of varying degrees. These familial terms both signaled and intensified the affects whether languages, religions, races, nations, species, contemporary terms in evolving historical systems—known, but the genealogical method also transformed the nineteenth-century obsession with origins is well-known, but the genealogical method also transformed contemporary terms in evolving historical systems—whether languages, religions, races, nations, species, or subjects—into siblings of varying degrees. These familial terms both signaled and intensified the affects whether languages, religions, races, nations, species, contemporary terms in evolving historical systems—known, but the genealogical method also transformed the nineteenth-century obsession with origins is well-known, but the genealogical method also transformed contemporary terms in evolving historical systems—whether languages, religions, races, nations, species, or subjects—into siblings of varying degrees. These familial terms both signaled and intensified the affects whether languages, religions, races, nations, species, contemporary terms in evolving historical systems—known, but the genealogical method also transformed the nineteenth-century obsession with origins is well-known, but the genealogical method also transformed contemporary terms in evolving historical systems—whether languages, religions, races, nations, species, or subjects—into siblings of varying degrees. These familial terms both signaled and intensified the affects whether languages, religions, races, nations, species, contemporary terms in evolving historical systems—known, but the genealogical method also transformed the nineteenth-century obsession with origins is well-known, but the genealogical method also transformed contemporary terms in evolving historical systems—whether languages, religions, races, nations, species, or subjects—into siblings of varying degrees. These familial terms both signaled and intensified the affects whether languages, religions, races, nations, species, contemporary terms in evolving historical systems—known, but the genealogical method also transformed the nineteenth-century obsession with origins is well-known, but the genealogical method also transformed contemporary terms in evolving historical systems—whether languages, religions, rac...


Pfau, Thomas. “’Botched Execution’ or Historical Inevitability: Conceptual Dilemmas in The Unintended Reformation” (essay commissioned for the Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies, 2015)

Pfau, Thomas. “Romantic Bildung as Ethical and Aesthetic Strategy” (essay commissioned for A Companion to Early German Romantic Philosophy, ed. Elizabeth Millán and Judith Norman (Amsterdam: Brill, 2015))


Conference Presentations


Lieber, Laura. “Songs of the Song of Songs: Response to the JPS Commentary on Shir ha-Shirim,” Annual SBL/AAR conference (Atlanta), November 21-24, 2015


Lieber, Laura. “Insufficient Suffering? An Exploration of Maternal-Filial Discourse in Performance,” Brown University Symposium on Sacred Song in the Late Antique and Byzantine East: Comparative Explorations (Providence, RI), May 4-6, 2015


Op-Eds

Pfau, Thomas. “Refugee Crisis puts European Union at Crossroad” (Philadelphia Inquirer, 13 Sept. 2015; also in Raleigh News and Observer, 10 Sept. 2015)