

Flipped Grant Wrap-up GERM 100-level course sequence

GERM 100-level sequence

The German 100-level sequence includes German 109, 110, 121, and 122. Depending on students' majors, most are required to take two to three semesters of a foreign language as part of the Carolina Core under the category of Global Citizenship and Multicultural Understanding: Foreign Language. Most students begin the sequence in German 109. Other students, who have taken German in high school, place into German 122, the final course in the sequence. Fewer students place into German 121 if they have had some exposure to the German language and need a short review before continuing their studies and then only have to take GERM 122 to complete the 100-level sequence. The 100-level courses are taught by instructors, adjuncts, and graduate teaching assistants and are coordinated by the Basic Courses Director of German who is responsible for developing the curriculum, syllabi, and assessments for all instructors.

We decided to flip the curriculum this year for several reasons: 1) to allow students to devote more time to listening and reading authentic German texts and to discussing culture in class with their instructor's guidance, which provide rich cultural information and opportunities for analytical thinking, 2) to allow the class activities and homework assignments to be more student-centered with opportunities for students to experiment and play with the language with less time devoted to the teacher introducing and explaining new material, and 3) to encourage the teaching of these courses to be more consistent by making it easier for instructors to speak mainly German in class by having their students practice the new content rather than the instructors feeling the need to introduce it.

Goals and assessment

Our goals for this grant period were to adopt a new textbook, redesign all four semesters of 100-level German (109, 110, 121, and 122), incorporate videos on new grammar topics, and redesign the assignments in each chapter. We planned to prepare all of the homework assignments for the next day's class so that students would come to class ready to use the new grammar and vocabulary in context. Last summer, we redesigned the syllabi for all of the courses and this year, we taught the new flipped versions of GERM 109, 110, and 121. We will finish the sequence this coming fall with GERM 122.

At the beginning of the fall 2016 semester, all of the instructors, graduate teaching assistants, and adjuncts were trained on the new flipped method during orientation in order to fulfill our goal that the instructors and graduate students teach the material in a similar manner without a strong focus on grammar and English-usage. Our goal was for instructors to conduct at least 85% of instruction in German, include a strong focus on reading and listening, and time in each chapter to discuss culture in addition to the focus on content and grammar.

Although there was no formal assessment process, we have the tests and quizzes completed by all of the students in the 109, 110, and 121 sections and the teaching evaluations of the graduate teaching assistants. In addition, we held de-briefing meetings at the end of the fall and spring semesters to see what the instructors thought went well and what we should change.

Based on student performance and feedback, we found that instead of having more time, it seemed we had less time to accomplish what we had planned and what was scheduled in the syllabus. This is likely due to the fact that we were working with a new textbook and did not realize how long each section would require. We appreciated the extra focus on culture, reading, and listening and noticed that students performed well in these categories, but realized that we need to think more carefully how to present and assess the grammar in a way that is most logical and fair for students. After teaching GERM 109 in the fall, we made several changes to the syllabus and assessments to take these issues into consideration and felt that the pace of the spring syllabus was more manageable. We will continue to make similar changes on the GERM 110 and 121 syllabi based on feedback from this semester.

Regarding instructor training, it seems that some instructors quickly grasped the new teaching method, while others needed additional training and feedback. Using the flipped model, however, did result in most of the instructors teaching more exclusively in German and focusing less on grammar, which did achieve our goal. While some instructors were concerned about students being able to complete the introductory material on their own, they were eventually convinced they could do it. It was useful that the course coordinator/TA supervisor was meeting regularly with the graduate teaching assistants so that she could check-in and answer questions and concerns. The coordinator was also teaching GERM 109 and 110 so she shared all of her lesson plans to provide a model for the new teaching assistants. She also collected their lesson plans and observed them throughout the semester to provide specific feedback on their teaching, which varied based on the instructor.

Future plans

Based on our assessment of the past year, we have several ideas for changes to make to next year's syllabi. In order to give students more practice with the material, instead of assigning all of the next day's material the night before in preparation for discussing it in class, we will assign exercises based on the same topic two days in a row. For example, one day one, students will watch a video on verb conjugation and then complete exercises for homework. On day two, they will use the verbs in class in the context of group exercises and task-based discussions. Then, prior to day three, they will have another set of homework that reinforces verb conjugations based on what they practiced in class. This way they will have a chance to reinforce the material after clarifying it in class. We initially thought it would be too complicated for students to complete one set of homework on old material and another set of homework on new material in the same sitting, but now realize they will likely retain the material better with a second chance to review the material. Since we have not yet taught GERM 122 in the new flipped manner, we will redesign the syllabus we worked on last summer to incorporate this new system of new and old material being assigned as homework on the same day.

Based on the observations of the instructors, it is clear that they need regular check-ins to remind them of the flipped philosophy and why this method is effective for the foreign language classroom. Some students were immediately convinced of the benefits while others needed reminders not to cater to their students if they had not done their homework. We will continue to offer the flipped orientation at the beginning of the semester and reinforce the philosophy throughout the semester through regular meetings, collecting lesson plans, and observing graduate teaching instructors.

We are very pleased with the flipped method overall and are grateful for the support from the Center for Teaching Excellence that enabled us to move forward on a project that we had been contemplating for many years. We look forward to continuing to refine our syllabi to make the introduction and practice of the material as student-centered as possible for students with many opportunities to use German in defined contexts and for specific tasks. We will continue to train the instructors to make sure they are taking advantage of all that the flipped syllabi have to offer and to make sure they understand why we are asking them to teach using this innovative approach. We are convinced of the value of the flipped model and would be happy to share our experiences, challenges, and successes with other instructors around the university.