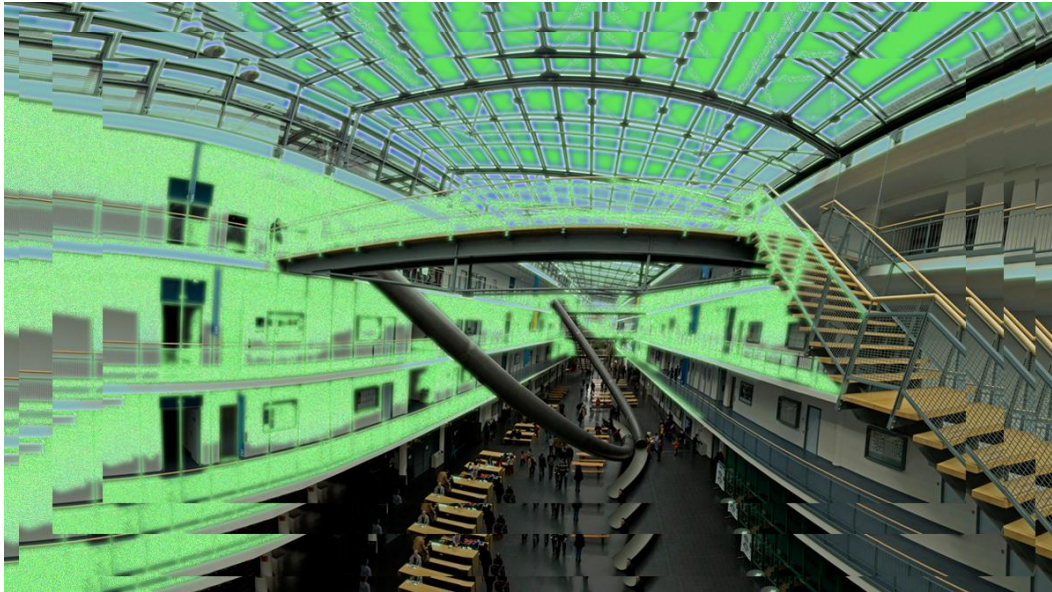


# Neues Curriculum

Journal for Best Practices in Higher Education German Studies



## **Symbiosis, Discovery, Professionalization: Promoting Faculty-Undergraduate Collaborative Research in German**

**Arne Koch and James Violette**

### **Expansion of Knowledge and Other Intangibles**

It is not particularly newsworthy that learning through research and collaboration can create many opportunities for both teachers and students. These two interconnected ideas are after all central to graduate education in just about every program, whether it be in the humanities, social or natural sciences. It may, however, still surprise some that learning through research collaboration appears to feature almost equally prominently in undergraduate education as well. *Undergraduate* and *Student-Faculty Collaborative Research* have in fact evolved during the last five years into almost universal catchphrases. Even the most basic internet searches for department and college vision statements underscore the extent of the prominence of undergraduate

research.<sup>1</sup> In some places, the catchy notion of *Undergraduate Research* has even begun to replace once-dominating marketing phrases aimed at fundraising and student recruitment, including Internationalization, Globalization, Diversity, and even Greening the Campus. Since at least 2003, when the *Council on Undergraduate Research* (CUR) assertively encouraged a greater focus on faculty-student collaboration from over 800 institutions already subscribed to its vision, the benefits of undergraduate student-faculty collaborative research have been touted. One of the CUR's White Papers, entitled "Faculty-Undergraduate Collaborative Research and Publishing," provides an insightful overview of several of the key ideas that offer key arguments promoting collaboration culminating in the idealistic but essential goal of "the expansion of knowledge":

The symbiosis established between the faculty member and the undergraduate collaborator energizes and informs the faculty member's teaching and research while simultaneously introducing the student to the joys of discovery as well as to lessons in persistence, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Faculty conducting research with undergraduates benefit enormously by having undergraduate collaborators invested in the research enterprise help to advance the faculty research program. Undergraduate students benefit from the opportunity both to learn the breadth and depth of their chosen fields of inquiry as well as to contribute meaningfully to the expansion of knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

While these and other benefits for students, faculty and departments are now widely accepted, faculty-student collaborative research continues to be implemented quite differently depending on each institution, and is often affected, for example, by tenure and promotion decisions or, more generally, the context of programmatic or departmental self-perceptions and reviews. Nonetheless, even professional publications dedicated to issues in German Studies have at least begun to regard faculty-student collaborative research as one way to work toward a strengthening, or (again depending on each institution) to assure as a minimum the survival of German in the U.S.<sup>3</sup>

Without being too negative or pessimistic, the reality remains, however, that at most institutions existing support structures for undergraduate research continue to be best suited for learners in the natural and social sciences. Even national umbrella organizations such as CUR or the *National*

*Conferences on Undergraduate Research* merely reinforce this disparity, as most of their panels and publications are aimed at programs outside the humanities. Even discussions about undergraduate research in English seem to take place mostly in the context of technical writing.<sup>4</sup> Yet on top of this institutional unevenness where federal funds and grant money often dictate policy, it is also frequently the inability or unwillingness of German programs and other humanistic disciplines to consider ways of integrating undergraduate research into their structures which has perpetuated the status quo.<sup>5</sup> This article will therefore briefly discuss a number of examples and the challenges of promoting faculty-undergraduate research and its tangible benefits. These include ways to help students professionalize and strengthen their credentials at an earlier stage, to enable faculty to pursue the ideal of focusing on teaching and research, and to address possible venues of reinvigorating sometimes struggling German programs against the odds. As merely one of many possible examples, this article highlights as a case study some of the projects in the Colby College German Program to illustrate possible ways of integrating undergraduate-faculty research programmatically while maneuvering the realities of administrative and other restrictions. Before discussions of positive outcomes as well as challenges for faculty and student, the article will illustrate a number of examples of student-faculty collaboration.

### **Ways and Means: Getting Started**

At the outset, it is crucial to accept that student-faculty collaboration can take many different forms. Among them there can be collaboration on faculty research projects that might be supported by a research assistantship or through an independent/directed study project. Another form of collaboration may be designed to address curricular or programmatic needs. The implementation of specific course content into the curriculum that might otherwise be too time or resource intensive to be conducted by one person is but one example. Collaborative results can and should then be disseminated through different venues; either as student research presentations, in the form of co-publications, through joint-presentations at conferences or in other formats. It is important to remember that at most institutions, one will always find funding support of some kind for such projects. The amount of support may not seem great to most faculty members and it may be restricted to summer research which turns off many colleagues who have to dedicate their summers to research travel. (There are ways of making this work, however).

In other cases, institutional support may be permissible for year-long research assistance. Unlike colleagues in the social and natural sciences, who are often assigned one or more student assistants per year as work study students or RAs, humanities faculty simply have to be more proactive and creative. Applying for available funds should never be a deterrent. As is frequently the case, success builds on previous success, so even if a program or individual should initially be unsuccessful procuring funds, one may initially encourage a student (or students) to pursue an independent study with the long-term goal of publication or presentation of his or her research – alone or together with the faculty mentor. A subsequent application for funding will then already be able to present a stronger argument as to the needs for additional funding to maintain and expand a collaborative research agenda.

The [German Program](#) at Colby College<sup>6</sup> can provide a number of examples of how undergraduate programs can expand their research profile in a short time. In just four years, German at Colby has now repeatedly combined summer with year-long funding and intersected student research on RA projects with directed studies. For example, the program has employed six research assistants over the last four summers, and has in addition secured funding for two semester-long RAs from the Mellon Foundation. One of these grant supported RA projects was a direct continuation of a summer-funded study focused on pedagogical issues in curriculum reforms, illustrating the need to be willing to approach a research focus programmatically. To date, two of these collaborations have culminated in a publication (a book edition)<sup>7</sup> and presentations at the 2010 ACTFL Convention in Boston.<sup>8</sup> The other RA projects still continue to feed into ongoing publication and teaching projects. One, in particular, has already proven to have an impact on the German Program's curriculum as part of the development of a database of reading resources in German for beginning and intermediate language classes. By seeking ways to expand such a longitudinal project, in this case through collaboration with a neighboring institution like Bates College, the rewards can be expanded in initially unexpected ways.<sup>9</sup>

As productive as the collaboration with research assistants can be, one should nevertheless not neglect independent or directed projects in addition to RA positions or as initial foundations. In one case at Colby, such a directed study evolved out of a general education course on Berlin and Vienna taught in English and culminated a little over a year later in a co-authored article for a peer-reviewed international journal on music and society.<sup>10</sup> While the results of

collaboration thus may vary greatly, it is crucial to visualize different available avenues in which students in collaboration with faculty can play a role. Identifying and encouraging promising students at an early stage will thus be of great benefit to more than just faculty members. And even if the result is *only* a student's presentation at a college's spring research colloquium,<sup>11</sup> at a summer research retreat,<sup>12</sup> or at an undergraduate conference,<sup>13</sup> or perhaps already a publication in an undergraduate journal (of which there are an increasing number, ranging from foreign language journals like the *Kennesaw Tower* to more general humanities publications such as *Philologia*),<sup>14</sup> the long term impact and positive outcomes should not be underestimated.

### **Imagining the Benefits**

It is certainly not limited to only the experiences at Colby that the benefits of Undergraduate-Faculty Research far outweigh the challenges. Nonetheless, it is crucial to consider both challenges and rewards when pursuing collaborative research. And although student-faculty research is initially always another opportunity for teaching, the relationship is, ideally, never without symbiotic benefits. It is therefore key to accept that discovery and exploration in collaborative research can and should be mutual. Students' gains vary greatly depending on each project, but most often encompass opportunities for professionalization, linguistic and cultural training, and simply the opportunity to strength one's résumé for future career decisions. Faculty profit in various ways as collaboration with students makes the ideal of interconnecting research and teaching possible. Additionally, the advancement of one's own research profile can become equally important as the prospect of exploring new research projects. In the end, the collaborative process of engagement and exploration itself also often benefits the respective program or department in different ways. One can imagine that among these rewards there are tangible research products that can help programs via curricular enhancement and productive student engagement. Examples include the aforementioned database of reading resources at Colby and Bates, different oral history projects (e.g., on Munich's Jewish community at the College of William and Mary<sup>15</sup>) or documentary film-making (e.g., the Memory and Film-project at Davidson College<sup>16</sup>).

Equally, if not more important for every program that engages students through research opportunities is the degree in which student collaborators become more fully integrated into the institutional fabric. While it may

ultimately require the creation of a sustained program of student research in order to assess any long-term benefits for a program, student collaborators at Colby have shared that research has helped them feel as part of an academic community and not solely as students. Informal interviews with collaborators as well as with prospective students have shown that student engagement through research significantly contributes to a perceived sense of importance and relevance of students' work.<sup>17</sup> Student collaborators attest that their research involvement positively revises their long-term attitude toward their studies in general and German in particular. A sense of productive engagement is thus coupled with the recognition that their work matters. While their research may be equally or more challenging than their course work, student collaborators have repeatedly indicated that their work provided a greater feeling of accomplishment than what they have gained from yet another paper written for a class. Moreover, students have commented that their vitae were clearly strengthened as a result of their work and that they learned successfully how to engage a subject both intellectually and linguistically in an independent fashion. The following brief excerpt from a student reflection on the topic of faculty-student collaborative research underscores the many positives from a student point of view:

By completing this research, especially the much more intensive summer research, I have greatly expanded my knowledge of German, Swiss and Austrian current events. I read a lot of news and cultural articles – many more than I actually ended up including as a text for the curriculum. I also improved upon my general cultural knowledge of different regions of the German-speaking world, and appreciate different areas I have not yet been able to visit. I also was able to read a large variety of authors and stories I had not yet been exposed to, something very beneficial for me personally as a German major. [...] Research in the traditional humanities at liberal arts schools such as Colby should be expanded because the students themselves are an under-utilized resource for departments and professors, research enhances student CVs while providing the student with learning experiences that can not [sic] be duplicated inside a classroom, and research enables a more complete exchange of ideas between students and professors. The personal gains and progress I have made in more fully understanding German culture and language, my conception of

teaching and putting together a curriculum, and the professional skills I have developed are the result of my positive research experiences.

Self-perception alone can be valuable not only for student retention but also for recruitment as it potentially affects the perception of other students who might otherwise not see opportunities within German Studies aside from the familiar recruitment highlights, such as study abroad opportunities and extra-curricular engagement. Through coordinated publicity efforts to show the extent to which student-faculty collaboration matter to specific departments and institutions, the worth of existing programs could not only be highlighted but even expanded. If German faculty across the U.S. and Canada are constantly engaged in struggles to gain recognition at different levels, why should one settle for using Goethe Institute flyers about why “German is 4 U”? Why should one only provide catchy lists of reasons why German may still be relevant to the liberal arts? By creating and mentoring student research opportunities, programs can instead present tangible examples of why German does matter at our institutions and beyond. As such, there are different avenues of presenting the various degrees of collaborative research success to the public and the administration:<sup>18</sup>

- Draw attention to events celebrating undergraduate research by inviting (depending on institution type): congressional members, state legislators, local leaders, and members of campus community (e.g., President; Dean; Board of Trustees members; offices of development, public relations)
- Send press releases to media or campus community identifying undergraduate research successes and highlights.
- Include undergraduate research as part of your programmatic narrative by making it an integral component of your program’s website and publications, and make undergraduate research part of your program’s mission and vision.
- Share your undergraduate research ideas and announcements with others through publications and presentations (*Unterrichtspraxis*; *Teaching Austria*; *CUR Quarterly*; *Inside Higher Education*; *Neues Curriculum*; ACTFL; pedagogy roundtables at your institution).

- Work toward undergraduate research collaboration with other organizations, institutions, and research centers (e.g., Colby-Bates collaboration).

By working toward different avenues of undergraduate research and highlighting all success stories, institutional rhetoric about fostering student engagement and student professionalization and about the ideal of teaching and research thus become a reality, not just slogans.

### **Trials and Errors of Collaboration**

When faced with challenges in the pursuit of establishing student-faculty collaborative research, it is practical to consider how even initial difficulties can be approached constructively. Most faculty will agree that they are above all confronted with administrative and fiscal limitations in their pursuit of student-faculty research opportunities. Yet wherever resources may in the end present themselves to colleagues outside of research-driven disciplines such as biology and chemistry, faculty in German should not be dismayed and falsely think that their work would not be considered. Even if a faculty mentor is not successful in grant or funding applications the first time around, he or she must persevere and as an alternative encourage potential students to set up an alternative method of collaboration, such as a directed study. If a department can produce tangible results out of a more traditional, teaching-based collaboration, the outcome of subsequent funding requests will in all likelihood be different. The importance here is to prove to the funding agency or administration that there are real possibilities for student-faculty research through German at one's institution. The identification of a German program as equal to others and not just as a service unit that offers language courses is key.

Similar to the sometimes daunting challenge of identifying and securing necessary funding sources, other challenges can often be overcome through a simple process of trial and error. These include whether or not programs are able to identify qualified and willing students for a given research project. Students must not only be convinced of the importance of their projects, but also be actively interested in them. Given students' changing interests, it may therefore not be uncommon to be confronted by a collaborator who decides to withdraw from his or her position last minute. The simple solution is to try again. All challenges to collaborative research ultimately can be handled with a

bit of ingenuity and perseverance. Even issues of linguistic or intellectual ability, which many colleagues will see as reasons not to pursue research collaborations with undergraduate students, can be dealt with productively. There are always ways that one can design research projects – even one’s own article or book projects on very narrow topics – that enable students to play an important role. Modify your proposed project or consider parts of the project that work with the student’s strengths. The key is to remain creative and to avoid assigning overly mundane tasks such as photocopying or merely picking up interlibrary loan items. Analyze and use students’ strengths and equip them with new ones through challenges and proper training. This is ultimately the best way to establish one’s collaboration with a student researcher. Be an educator and set yourself and your collaborator up for success. In order to keep the momentum going and to establish undergraduate research as part of your program’s identity it is thus key to be willing to accept the outcomes of less successful cooperation while looking for the next project and working toward creating a culture of undergraduate-faculty collaborative research.

In the end, the potential benefits of undergraduate student-faculty collaborative research far outweigh all of the inbuilt challenges. As the success stories of the German Program at Colby College and other programs readily underscore, the promotion of collaborative research can have a tremendously positive impact on one’s institution, program and curriculum. And, of course, also on our students themselves, as one Colby College student documented in a report at the conclusion of a summer research project: “[By] making a positive contribution to the school I attend, and feeling that my work has a tangible value, [I] greatly improved my work ethic and desire to come to my office each day, as well as my pride in my German major.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Fifteen of the first twenty-one entries for “Undergraduate Research” on Google point toward a practical institutional shift at many major research universities and undergraduate institutions alike as special programs and administrative units focused exclusively on undergraduate research become increasingly widespread. <http://www.google.com> Web. 20 March 2011. A first draft of this article was presented at the 2010 ACTFL Convention in Boston, MA. We would like to thank all participants of the panel “Breaking Ground: Efficacies and Challenges of Undergraduate Research in German.” Special thanks go to Scott Denham, Gregor Thuswaldner, and Cyrus Shahan.

<sup>2</sup> “Faculty-Undergraduate Collaborative Research and Publishing.” [http://www.cur.org/wp\\_respub.html](http://www.cur.org/wp_respub.html) Web. 09. Dec. 2010.

<sup>3</sup> See James Davidheiser and Gregory Wolf. “Fanning the Flames: Best Practices for Ensuring the Survival of Small German Programs.” *Die Unterrichtspraxis/Teaching German*, 42 (2009): 60–67. Here: 65. See also for a more general discussion, Lisa Burke and Monica Cummins. “Using Undergraduate Student-Faculty Collaborative Research Projects to Personalize Teaching.” *College Teaching* 40.4 (2002): 129-133.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ncur.org> Web. 10. Jan. 2011.

<sup>5</sup> A recent discussion thread on the Women in German Listserv underscores the extent in which undergraduate research continues to be overlooked in German Studies: “Does anyone know of a German undergraduate research journal or something like it on-line? Also, is there a good conference for undergraduates to showcase their research? I see my colleagues doing this in other fields, but am not aware of these resources in German Studies.” *Women in German Digest*, Vol. 39, Issue 1, Feb. 1, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> *German Program at Colby College, Waterville, ME.* <http://www.colby.edu/german>

<sup>7</sup> Reinhold Solger. *Anton in Amerika. Novelle aus dem deutsch-amerikanischen Leben.* Herausgegeben und mit einem Nachwort versehen von Arne Koch. Unter Mitarbeit von Meredith T. Fast. (Bibliothek des 19. Jahrhunderts Bd. 4.) Hannover: Wehrhahn Verlag, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> “Student and Prof Co-Present.” Colby College News. <http://bit.ly/fekU0Z> Web. 16. Nov. 2010

<sup>9</sup> The Colby-Bates German Virtual Library. <http://villy.colby.edu>

<sup>10</sup> Arne Koch and Sei Harris. “*The Sound of Yourself Listening* – Faust and the Politics of the Unpolitical” *Popular Music and Society* 32.5 (2009): 579-94.

<sup>11</sup> The annual Colby Undergraduate Research Symposium, a college-wide opportunity for students to share their research findings, stresses the intention of working toward external venues for dissemination as well. As this year’s call for abstracts stated, “This all-College symposium is part of a larger college vision to engage as many Colby students as possible in significant research and creative projects that lead to presentation of results before their peers, at professional meetings, and in refereed publications. The all-campus, multi-departmental student symposium was started to further this goal. The intent is to provide a venue for students to share their scholarly experiences, to provide an opportunity for interdisciplinary presentations, and to draw external attention to Colby’s experience in providing undergraduate scholarship opportunities.” *Call For Presentations. Twelfth Annual Colby Undergraduate Research Symposium*, 27 March 2001.

<sup>12</sup> The Colby Undergraduate Summer Research Retreat. <http://bit.ly/mb7MjU>

<sup>13</sup> Increasingly, both liberal arts colleges and research universities organize undergraduate student conferences with widely advertised calls for papers. Among these are foreign language and literature conferences (e.g. The National Undergraduate Literature Conference at Weber State University, UT; The Literature and Linguistics Undergraduate Colloquium at Gordon College, MA; The Undergraduate Research Conference on German Studies at Lafayette College, PA), film and media conferences (Notre Dame Undergraduate Film and Television Conference) and, of course, multi-disciplinary conferences, including the Kule Institute for Advanced Studies Undergraduate Student Conference at the University of Alberta or the National Conference on Undergraduate Research (rotating host institutions).

<sup>14</sup> *Undergraduate Journals.* <http://www.cur.org/ugjournal.html> Web. 10. Jan. 2011.

<sup>15</sup> *Student-Faculty Research in German Studies.*

<http://www.wm.edu/as/modernlanguages/german/research/index.php> Web. 10. Jan. 2011.

<sup>16</sup> *Professor Learns Along with Students by Producing "Memory Project" Film About Her Mother.*

<http://www3.davidson.edu/cms/x41970.xml> Web. 10. Jan. 2011.

<sup>17</sup> The following observations are extracted from written and oral feedback from research assistants at Colby College.

<sup>18</sup> The following is in part based on the Council for Undergraduate Research's *Ways to Foster External Relations*. <http://www.cur.org/governmt.html> Web. 10. Jan. 2011.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. xvi.