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“Best Practices in Undergraduate Curricula”

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Georgetown University German Department (GUGD) Undergraduate Curriculum:
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The GUGD Curricular Renewal Process

I. Impetus

“At a particular moment of its history and evolution, the department was able to see the opportunity to relate values that were well established and shared by the entire faculty to specific educational and programmatic issues, both of long standing and of more recent provenance. Although these values and beliefs had long remained relatively unspecified and unarticulated, they were substantial enough to be called forth for a well defined set of concerns, thereby enabling the faculty to see certain aspects of its work as requiring attention and focused commitment” (Byrnes, 2001, p. 524)

II. Statement of underlying beliefs → “curriculum by design” (Byrnes, 1998)

- a. Long-term nature of SLA
- b. Language use as (con/inter)textual in nature, i.e., generic (e.g., Bakhtin, 1986)

III. Elimination of language-content bifurcation by integrating all four years of instruction within a literacy-oriented curriculum

- a. literacy orientation (e.g., Gee, 1990, 1998; Hasan, 1996; Kress, 1994; The New London Group, 1996)
 - i. centrality of texts and textuality (Byrnes & Kord, 2002; Kern, 2000; Maxim, in press) → Systemic Functional Linguistics (e.g., Halliday, 1993; Halliday & Hasan, 1989)
- b. explicit attention to development of advanced language abilities (Byrnes, 2002b; Byrnes & Sprang, 2004)
- c. reevaluation of assessment practices (Norris, 2000)

IV. Implementation of genre-based approach to language teaching and learning

Genre as

“a staged, goal-oriented, purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture” (Martin, 1984, p. 25)

“[C]onventionalized communicative events embedded within disciplinary or professional practices” (Bhatia, 2002, p. 23)

- a. sequencing content (Maxim, 2005a)
 - i. primary vs. secondary discourses (Gee, 1998)
- b. pedagogy (e.g., Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Johns, 2002; Martin, 1985, 1999; Swales, 1990)
 - i. modeling → explicit instruction
 - ii. joint negotiation
 - iii. independent construction
- c. assessment (Byrnes, 2002a)
 - i. genre-derived tasks
 - ii. prototypical level performances

V. Involvement and collaboration of faculty and graduate students at all levels (Byrnes, 2001; Maxim, 2005b; Pfeiffer, 2002)

- a. extensive class observations across the curriculum
- b. materials development (Eigler, 2001)
- c. instructional mentoring (Byrnes, Crane, & Sprang, 2002)
- d. independent teaching and course development (Weigert, 2004)

VI. Development of publicly shared knowledge and practices and the establishment of a departmental culture (Byrnes, 2001)

Curriculum Enhancement Measures

- I. Continual examination of curricular materials**
 - a. revision of Level II, summer 2003
 - b. revision of theme 4, Level III, spring & summer 2004
- II. Further refinement of the role of genre** (Byrnes & Sprang, 2004; Crane, Liamkina, & Ryshina-Pankova, 2004)
 - a. narrative-argumentative writing continuum for advanced levels
- III. Validation of assessment practices** (Maxim, 2005a)
 - a. correspondence between level profiles and prototypical level performances

Curricular Outcomes

- I. Speaking development (Norris & Pfeiffer, 2003)
- II. Writing development (Byrnes & Maxim, 2005)
- III. Enrollment

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