

Department of German, Scandinavian and Dutch “Green Germany”

Introduction

As the concern over Global Climate Change (GCC) continues to grow and the emphasis on energy efficiency, sustainability, and resilient communities becomes stronger, the need for expanded opportunities to learn about sustainability concepts and methodologies also becomes more apparent. It is, however, difficult to limit such a curriculum to one discipline. Interdisciplinary study is needed to work on solving complex problems such as sustainability. As the United States struggles to develop its own energy policy ideas can be gleaned from looking abroad. I spent the spring of 2011 developing sustainability and environmental curriculum modules based on case studies, policies, cultural norms, conversations with and research by field leaders in German-speaking countries. These modules are the preparatory work for a future German sustainability course, which will help to bridge the German Studies major with other University programs including topics from the Environmental Science, Policy, and Management major, as well as the Sustainability Studies Minor. The modules will help open opportunities for language majors, in addition to moving University curriculum forward by connecting the increasingly important sustainability concerns to a wider variety of students.

Methods

This project aimed to create a number of modules that could function within a 3xxx level University course. In addition, modules were designed so that they could also be tailored to a more introductory, high school level. This second aim is important as the idea of introducing sustainability into the curriculum trickles down to younger stages in the future. To achieve the goal of having modules of different levels, each of 7 modules has synopses that are directed at an introductory and advanced level.

Module themes were selected through collaboration with faculty sponsor of this project Charlotte Melin, Associate Professor in German, Scandinavian and Dutch (GSD), Beth Kautz, GSD Director of Language Instruction, and Peter Schmitt, senior undergraduate in Environmental Science, Policy, and Management and German Studies. The modules include an introduction, the city of Freiburg im Breisgau, chemist Michael Braungart, the food system, energy, environmental groups, and a history of the green movement.

Peter Schmitt
German/Environmental Science, Policy, and Management
'11
schm1578@umn.edu

Module example: Freiburg im Breisgau



Introductory Level

Freiburg im Breisgau is a city of roughly 220,000 people in the state of Baden-Württemberg, a state in the Southwest corner of Germany. Freiburg is nestled in a valley just north of the border of Switzerland and just east of the border of France. Freiburg is so named because it was a free market city. Much of its historical wealth came from silver mines in the Schauinsland, a mountain on the border of the city.

The more recent history, as it pertains to sustainability, is anchored by the unique domination of the Green party, as well as progressive environmental legislation in the early 1990s. Freiburg is now known as the “Solar Capital” of Germany, as well as a city that likes to “cycle and recycle.” The flat roads of this valley city, coupled with some of the sunniest and warmest weather in Germany, support a huge bicycle culture and infrastructure. Freiburg boasts one of the oldest universities in Germany, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, which was founded in 1457.

Key Terms

die Umweltpolitik: environmental politics
das Heliotrop: Heliotrope (A specially designed building that rotates with the movement of the sun)
die Solaranlage: solar system
die Verkehrspolitik: Transportation politics
der Klimaschutz: Climate protection
das Passivhaus: Passive House (Passive is a standard similar to LEED but much stricter and with actual checks)
die Abfallwirtschaft: Waste infrastructure/management
die Waldwirtschaft: Forestry/Silviculture

Moving Forward

The next stage of this project is the continued development of curriculum activities, exams, and other evaluations. This work will be done by a graduate student in the German, Scandinavian and Dutch department. The content and ideas that have been gathered through this project will be an excellent guideline as the final curriculum is determined and developed. The course will be fully prepared within the next two semesters.

Once the course is prepared, there will also need to be a great deal of promotion of the course to generate interest from students. To continue the expansion of a joined sustainability/German course load, an interest from students, and faculty, will have to be continually demonstrated. With the growth of the Sustainability Studies Minor and the added interest in sustainability around the world, this should not be a great concern. Finally, as a long term goal, it may be possible to develop either a new concentration within the German Studies major or a Sustainability in German minor.

My Academic Gain

As a German Studies and Environmental Science, Policy, and Management double major with a Sustainability Studies Minor, this UROP provided me with the opportunity to synthesize all of my academic interests while progressing future University curriculum. This UROP functioned as an excellent capstone for all of my undergraduate studies. Completing this UROP also allows me to graduate feeling that I have both received a world class education, as well as given back to the University and helped its continued progression as a top University.

Acknowledgements

For developing the initial idea for this project, as well as providing continuing support and suggestions throughout the research process, I would like to thank Charlotte Melin. For her suggestions and input into the project, I would also like to thank Beth Kautz. Finally, I would like to thank the University of Minnesota and the GSD department for this fantastic opportunity.

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Driven to DiscoverSM