

THE STUDY OF WORLD LANGUAGES AT WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY: A CENTENNIAL HISTORY

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Sources and acknowledgements

Much of the information for this summary history is drawn from three documents located in the Department office files. The primary source for the years 1907-1967 is an anonymous text entitled "A Brief History of the Foreign Language Department: 1907-1967." This document also contains an alphabetical list of faculty members who worked in the department during this period that is not included in the present document. In 1974, Suzanne R. Spurlock, a student in Dr. Thomas Baldwin's graduate seminar in Foreign Language College Teaching, wrote "A History of the Development of the Foreign Language Department at Western Kentucky University." This paper cites James P. Cornette's "A History of the Western Kentucky State Teachers College" (diss., George Peabody College for Teachers, 1941) and a variety of publications and historical documents located in the Western Kentucky University archives, as well as an interview with Ms. Fannie Holland. Ms. Spurlock includes information about the teaching of languages at the Glasgow Normal Institute between 1876 and 1887, when that institution moved to Bowling Green and eventually was transferred to the state of Kentucky. The present history restricts itself to the centennial period 1906-2006, however. A third brief manuscript, probably authored by Drs. Jim Wayne Miller and Thomas Baldwin in 1992, summarizes the history of the teaching of German at Western Kentucky University.

In writing this historical overview, I have also consulted present and former faculty members and friends of the department to fill in gaps and check for accuracy of information. I am particularly grateful for the contributions of these colleagues: Professors Emeriti Thomas Baldwin, Robert Martin, Mania Ritter, and Clarice Scarborough, and Professor Mary Ellen (Mrs. Jim Wayne) Miller.

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In many ways, the twentieth century history of the Department of Modern Languages and of the discipline of world languages at Western Kentucky University mirrors that of most similar American institutions of higher learning during this period. In a few ways, however, particularly in regard to the teaching of the classical and non-Western languages and the temporary incorporation of other disciplines into the department, the history of this endeavor and of what came to be the present academic department has deviated from the norm. It is perhaps also not always the case that faculty in our discipline have played the significant roles in the broader development of the institution of which they were a part as some of our forebears have done.

1907-1951

Classical Studies were central language offerings in the first years after the founding of Western Kentucky State Normal School. An Advanced Certificate course of study, leading to a lifetime teaching certificate, required five courses in Latin. Greek was also offered until 1931. Dr. M.A. Leiper, a Princeton fellow and graduate student, taught Ancient and Modern Languages and English until 1910, when he became head of the Department of English. F.C. Grise became the principal Latin teacher in 1918 and from that year until 1949 was the head of the language department. He then became dean of Western Kentucky College until his retirement in 1959. In 1967, Western Kentucky University acknowledged Professor Grise's contributions by dedicating the building presently housing the Gordon Ford College of Business to him.

Modern languages were also taught from the beginning. French was the primary offering, with German courses given on demand by a part-time instructor. Ms. Elizabeth Woods joined Dr. Leiper in the newly established Department of Ancient and Modern Languages in 1911. Ms. Woods was also a central language teacher at Western Kentucky College, offering courses in Spanish, German, and French for many years. After a year abroad at Oxford University and the Sorbonne (1919-1920), she returned to Bowling Green to teach until 1938. After her retirement, she was the college's Landscape Architect for a number of years. Ms. Woods died in 1967 at the age of 102.

A number of energetic women faculty members have made their careers in our department. A legendary instructor was Sibyl Stonecipher, who taught German and Latin at the college from 1929 until 1964. Ms. Stonecipher had leadership roles in the Kentucky Association of University Women, the Kentucky Classical Association, and the League of Women Voters. She was named to Who's Who of American Women in 1964. Another female faculty mainstay of the department during this period was Marjorie Claggett, who taught French for many years. An avid environmentalist, she was still attending national save-the-whale conferences in her 70s.

At the university-run teacher Training School, Fannie Holland taught Latin and sometimes French from 1942 to 1970 and then Latin part-time at the university from 1970 to 1973.

In 1924, when the first degree class was graduated from Western, all students had to have completed ten semester hours in one language. Beginning in the same year, French and Latin majors were established, with a minimum requirement of 24 semester hours. German was officially listed among the department offerings in 1929, with 12 semester hours offered, the standard requirement for a minor. In 1931, there were 14 classes in French and German with a combined enrollment of 451 students. The modern languages program stated its academic purpose in this year as:

To bring the student who wants only a reading knowledge of French or German into contact with the literature of the country and with material in his own field. To train high school teachers of French by specialized courses and the French Club.

Spanish had also become part of the modern language curriculum in the 1920-21 academic year, with Professor Elizabeth Woods the first instructor. Spanish was listed for the first time among permanent offerings in the 1943-1944 bulletin. In that year, Professor H. F. McChesney offered four semesters of the language for 16 quarter hours of credit (a point in time in which Western had evidently abandoned semester credit hours in favor of quarter hour units). In 1945, a third year of Spanish was added. In 1951, college the bulletin included both Spanish and German as minors. The essential core of the Department of Modern Languages was now in place.

Some of Western's student language clubs had their beginnings in the 1920s. The Classical Club and "Le Cercle Français" were founded in 1925. Over the years, these groups sponsored many events, including the production of plays, "Roman" banquets, and picnics. The Classical Club, disbanded in 1942 due to the war and decreased enrollment, was reconstituted in 1950.

1951-67

From 1950 through 1960, all language majors were recorded as Foreign Language majors, rather than as majors in French or Latin, the two primary language programs. A major had to complete 18 hours in either French or Latin, with an addition 12 hours in each of two minor languages: French, Latin, Spanish, or German. Five elective hours in "foreign language studies" and a course in the teaching of foreign languages completed the 51-hour major. By 1960, the major had been altered to require 24 hours in the principal language and 18 hours in one minor language of study, with 12 hours in a third language. At this time, a student could also use German or Spanish as the principal language of study.

1960 brought a variety of changes, some of them due, no doubt, to the leadership of Dr. Paul G. Hatcher as head, who had joined the department in 1959. Spanish became a major with offerings expanded to 33 semester hours. The intensifying Cold War brought other changes. Elementary Russian was offered for the first time at the Community College in spring 1951 and became a regular offering on the main campus later that year. In 1962, the department instituted

a four-semester sequence in Russian and in fall 1965 an 18-hour minor. German offerings also expanded in the early 1960's. It became a departmental major in 1962, and in 1963 the German faculty was expanded to two full-time positions, one of whom was Dr. Jim Wayne Miller, who later became an internationally known translator and creative writer in English.

Non-curricular changes also came along at this time. Along with departments all over the United States and in line with new theories about how people learn languages, the WKU department added a modern technological language lab with 20 listening stations in 1961. This facility was doubled by 1964 into a student "practice" lab, and at the same time, 30 student stations with appropriate electronic equipment were installed as a teaching laboratory. The latter facility was expanded with 10 more stations in 1966. This increase in size was made possible by a physical removal of the Foreign Language Department to the Academic-Athletic building (now Diddle Arena), where it remained until the construction of the Fine Arts Center afforded new office space in 1974. The funding support that this growth in language lab space implies is a clear indication of the importance given foreign language learning from the time Sputnik I was launched in 1957 into the 1970's.

The classical languages also profited by this emphasis. Elementary Greek, discontinued in 1931, was again taught in 1964. In 1965, a major in Classics was added. The long-standing major in Latin remained the more important classical language program, however.

The interest in language study at this time led the department to offer "sample" modern language courses for one semester hour of credit in fall 1965. Non-traditional language offerings were among them: Chinese, Italian, Arabic, and Romanian, as well as the already-established languages of French, German, Russian, and Spanish. These General Modern Language Courses were offered on demand into the 1970s. The addition of new faculty positions held by doctoral recipients strengthened all of the primary language programs in this period.

Student language groups, which had played a lively role at the institution since 1925, continued to be important elements in the Foreign Language Department program during this period. The Spanish Club was founded in 1960 and the German Club in 1962. In 1964, local chapters of national honorary societies were founded: Delta Phi Alpha (German), Pi Delta Phi (French), and Sigma Delta Pi (Spanish). In 1966, Western Kentucky University hosted the national Junior Classical League Convention. At that time, the League was the second largest co-ed youth organization in the United States, with only 4-H being larger. Eighteen hundred delegates registered for the event.

1967-75

In 1967, Dr. Carol Paul Brown joined the Western Spanish faculty and in 1968 he became the head of the Foreign Language Department, which was composed of fifteen professors at that time. The high expectations for student achievement in that period were indicated by the 1972 placement policy stating that: "A student having had two years in High School is expected to enroll at the third semester level in the same language." In the 1974-75 catalog, students with three or more years of high school language study were encouraged to enroll in a 300-level course, if their abilities merited it.

Part of the expansion of the teaching faculty was the addition of two professors of German in 1968, Dr. Thomas Baldwin and Dr. Robert Laessig. Also in that year, Ms. Mania Ritter joined the department to teach French and, eventually, Russian. By the time Ms. Ritter retired in 1989, she was carrying out instruction for the Russian minor program essentially by herself. Dr. Robert Martin joined the department in 1971 to teach German and courses in pedagogy. Dr. James Babcock, who had taught French and Spanish intermittently since 1965 at WKU, became a permanent member of the French faculty in 1969. Dr. Raul Padilla came to Western in 1971 as instructor of Spanish, and Ms. Clarice Scarborough taught in the same program from 1964 to 1984.

The growth in the language programs was so promising at this time that by the early 1970s the department had introduced Master of Arts in Education programs in French and German and Master of Arts, Master of Arts in College Teaching, and Master of Arts in Education in Spanish. The faculty proposed to add the Master of Arts and the Master of Arts in College Teaching in French and an undergraduate major in Russian in 1972. However, in the preceding year, revisions in general education had eliminated the undergraduate foreign language graduation requirement, and these promising beginnings were destined not to result in permanent programs. A quarter century followed, during which foreign language study languished at many state and private institutions of higher learning in the United States.

On the other hand, study abroad became increasingly important in department programming during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and this trend has continued and grown stronger. Dr. Paul Hatcher was instrumental in establishing a summer study abroad agreement with the University of the Americas in Mexico in 1965, the first such program sponsored by the department. In subsequent years, large numbers of students participated in this program as well as in others in Pueblo, Mexico; Montreal, Canada; Montpellier, France; and Rome, Italy. Dr. Baldwin was instrumental in the founding of the Kentucky Institute of International Studies in 1975, the study abroad consortium that now, in 2005, has expanded to almost 30 summer programs and four semester programs.

1976-2005

The 1970s and 1980s saw the gradual decline of language study at Western, in accord with national trends de-emphasizing such study. The classical languages were the first to show this. By the fall semester of 1991, Latin was no longer among the regular department offerings. The graduate programs in French and the Russian major proposed in 1972 did not materialize, and in the next years all of the fledgling graduate programs in French, German, and Spanish declined, so that in the 1990s only a trickle of graduate students completed the M.A.Ed. with a major in one of these languages. Early in the new millennium, the state Council on Postsecondary Education required the department to change these programs into M.A.Ed. programs with a minor emphasis of 12-15 graduate hours in French, German, or Spanish. The Russian minor was deleted in 2000, and most of its supporting courses deleted or suspended a year later.

Some of the earlier language offerings migrated to the Department of Religious Studies over the years. Ron Veenker of that department began to teach Hebrew some time after his arrival at Western in 1968, and Margaret Curtis-Howe began teaching Greek at some point after she arrived in 1972. At the present time, Religious Studies faculty members offer introductory courses in Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, and Pali. Elementary Latin courses will join the other classical language offerings in this department in spring 2006.

Although offerings in the Department of Modern Languages came to be restricted to modern, Western languages during the latter 20th century, department staffing and programming were enhanced in an unusual fashion during this period. In about 1984, the WKU folk studies program had to close its department in response to cost-cutting measures and joined the Department of Foreign Languages. This consolidated department was re-named the Department of Modern Languages and Intercultural Studies. The anthropology program left the Sociology Department in 1994 and joined the MLIS Department as well. Although the administrative marriage of these disciplines was essentially harmonious, no joint academic or extracurricular programming resulted during this period. In 2004, the MLIS Department separated into the Department of Modern Languages and the Department of Folk Studies and Anthropology.

In the late 1990s, again following national trends and under the influence of global events, the study of foreign languages began an upswing that has continued to the present day. The university instituted a one-semester general education requirement for all students in 1998, and in the summer of 2004, this requirement was expanded to “proficiency at the second semester level.” The Spanish program grew tremendously, increasing from approximately 40 majors in 1999 to more than 90 in 2005. German enrollments also experienced an upsurge at the beginning of the new century, due to a large influx into the Bowling Green community of Bosnian immigrants who had spent several years as refugees in German-speaking lands.

Staffing in the modern languages, which had declined in the lean years of the 1980’s and 1990’s, grew markedly in the first years of the 21st century, fueled by a general increase in enrollments at WKU and by the more demanding general education foreign language requirement. At the time of this writing, fourteen full-time faculty members teach on the main and Glasgow campuses, with almost as many part-time instructors also contributing courses. Half of the full-time faculty are instructors with continuing contracts, whose primary duties are to deliver general education courses but who also make many other contributions in the outreach and student engagement aspects of department programming. The department will add a full-time position in Chinese in fall 2006, funded through grant collaboration with the Western geology program, which has an active exchange of researchers and students through the Karst Research Institute.

The department faculty drafted a vision statement in fall 2005 that anticipates further expansion of department staffing and offerings in non-Western languages by 2015 and the intensification of outreach and engagement activities for students. Given the dynamic history of this department and of language study in the United States, this vision may well be realized. World languages have been declared a high needs area in the Kentucky public school system, with many school districts unable to identify and attract qualified teachers. The preparation of students from Kentucky schools entering classes at Western has consequently not been as

uniformly strong as is desirable. At the time of this writing, the State Board of Education is considering a proposal to require the attainment of a certain minimum level of proficiency in a world language mandatory for high school graduation in the Commonwealth, with that proficiency to be assessed by means of a national test. If that requirement should be adopted, even if phased in over a number of years, the Department of Modern Languages at Western Kentucky University could look forward to working with better prepared, more highly motivated students in the future. Be that as it may, the members of the department are committed to supporting WKU's recently adopted Quality Enhancement Plan to "engage students for success in a global society." Our own mission is central to that effort:

Through coursework, experience abroad, and other cultural encounters, the Modern Languages Department cultivates communicative skills and cultural awareness that prepare students at Western Kentucky University to be more knowledgeable and sensitive citizens of the local, regional, and global communities.

Faculty and staff milestones, 1975-2005

Retirements –

1986, Paul Hatcher
1989, Carol Brown
1989, Mania Ritter
1991, Robert Martin
1999, Tom Baldwin
2000, Raul Padilla
2006, Linda S. Pickle

Deaths –

Thurston Taylor
Carol Paul Brown
Johnnie Huey
1976, Walter S. Storer
1979, Bill Walls
1996, Jim Wayne Miller
2001, Paul Hatcher
2001, James Babcock

Department head terms –

Paul Hatcher, 1959-65
Carol Paul Brown, 1968-89
Luzma Umpierre, 1989-91
Lynwood Montell (Folk Studies), Interim Head, 1991-93
Larry Danielson (Folk Studies), 1993-96
Thomas Baldwin, 1996-99
Linda S. Pickle, 1999-2006

Office associates –

Laura Harper Lee, 1972-89
Karen Kallstrom, 1989-98
Holly Oglesbee, 1998 to present

Faculty accomplishments of distinction, 1975-2005 –

- Tom Baldwin: co-founder and early president of the Kentucky Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and recipient of KCTFL's first Lifetime Achievement Award (1998); President of the Kentucky Association of Teachers of German (early 1970s and 1999-2001); Potter College Faculty Excellence Award (ca. 1980); Kentucky AATG Achievement Award (2001)
- Paul Hatcher: first dean of Potter College (1965-74); state director of Sigma Delta Pi Spanish honorary (several years, beginning in 1965); son P. Graham Hatcher established the annual Paul G. and Ernestine G. Hatcher Modern Language Lecture Series in 2004
- Robert Martin: Grawemeyer Award for German instructional material development (1975)
- Laura G. McGee: Fulbright Junior Research Award (2002-03); President of the Kentucky Association of Teachers of German (2004-06)
- Jim Wayne Miller: Thomas Wolfe Literary Award (1980); Zoe Kincaid Brockman Memorial Award (1989), Appalachian Writers Association Book of the Year Award (1984 and 1989); novel *Newfound* named "Editor's Choice" by *Booklist* and one of the "Best Books of the Year" by the American Library Association (1989); Appalachian Consortium Laurel Leaves Award (1991); Denny Plattner Award for non-fiction from *Appalachian Heritage* (1994); named Kentucky Poet of the year by the Alice Lloyd College of Pippa Passes, KY (1996)
- Linda S. Pickle: Kentucky World Language Association (formerly KCTFL) Lifetime Achievement Award (2005)
- Mania Ritter: Potter College Teaching Award (1977)