

Why German?

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Knowledge of German complements many fields, including future careers. It enriches a liberal education, because the German language, history and culture have played and continue to play an important role in the United States.

120 million speak German worldwide

95 million Europeans are native speakers of German. Germany is Europe's strongest economy located at the geographical center of Europe, linking East and West. The Federal Republic has among the highest GNPs and is the second highest creditor nation, largely to the developing world.

Learning German provides deeper insights into a region that plays a vital role in central Europe's intellectual and economic life and in its culture and cultural history.

German is a language of international business and tourism

The US military and international corporations choose to locate in Germany and as a language of business, diplomacy, and tourism in Western Europe, German stands second only to English; in the East it holds first place. German speaking businessmen live in every major commercial center of the world, recently even in Kazakstan—to which their parents had been forcibly moved by Stalin from the Volga region and from which they emigrated to Germany in the 1990s.

In reverse, in many regions, Germans account for the largest percentage of tourists.

Learning German allows Americans to participate in Germany's international business.

German in the European Union

The 95 million European native speakers of German surpass those of English, French, Italian (58-60 million each) or Spanish (36 million). With Europe's strongest economy, Germany's central location helps it to function as a link, so German can shed light on a region that is of interest to the rest of the world. Recently, fulfilling the expectation to be able to work in two additional languages, officials in the European Union study German.

German business is intertwined with the US

Germany occupies every year one of the top three spots among exporting countries and invests heavily in Eastern Europe, Asia and Latin America. It is particularly connected with the United States. In 1995 supported 2,507 separate enterprises with 494,000 employees.

German engineering powers exports

Production machinery, such as printing presses and box folding machines continue to be a German specialty. A number of American schools of engineering recognize this dominance by requiring the study of German in order to allow their students to experience internships in Germany. Many American engineering alumni live and work in German-speaking countries.

Book publishing and printing are big in Germany

Germany is also the world's third biggest producer of books, the number of new publications rose in 2004 by 6.9 percent of 86.543 titles, one in every ten books in the world. With a total production of items for the book trade of 960 million, the industry ranks only behind England and China.

Many Nobel Prize winners

The significance of German extends well beyond economic and engineering. A review of Nobel Prizes shows that scientists from the three major German-speaking countries have won 21 in Physics, 30 in Chemistry, and 25 in Medicine, while many laureates from other countries received their training in German universities, benefiting from a vibrant give and take. Nine Nobel Prizes in Literature have been awarded to German and Swiss writers, and seven Germans and Austrians have received the Peace Prize.

German is a language of science

German is the second-most commonly used scientific language. In spite of the dominance of English, complex, theoretical thinking appears to be impossible without a basis in a native language. Therefore, while there are many areas of science with internationally standardized terminologies, truly creative projects that involve language-based thought happen in the native language. Einstein worked in German and developed his ground breaking thoughts through the language. Werner Heisenberg believed that scientific understanding "ultimately has to be based on ordinary language." Explaining scientific questions in the native language becomes part of the creative process because "that is the only way in which we can be sure that we are dealing with reality."

Given these environments, the advantages of bilingualism for employment in business and the sciences are obvious.

The significance of Germany in Sports

Exercising not only the mind but also the body is part of life in Germany. Every town has a swimming pool, athletics track and leisure complex and in the world of sports, speakers of German figure prominently. For the third time, Germany accumulated the highest total number of medals in the 2006 Winter Olympics. It also won the second-highest in the 1996 summer Olympics. Athletes from German-speaking countries dominate alpine skiing to the extent that German is the sport's primary language. In soccer, Germany has won the European Cup for the third time. In the history of World Cup soccer, Germany has reached the finals more often than any other country, and only Brazil has won the title more often.

In 2006, Germany again hosted the World Cup and advanced to the semifinals. Tennis is of course another sport at which Germans have excelled.

Germans take culture seriously

German is the language of not only Goethe, Nietzsche and Kafka, but also of Freud and Carl Jung and it gave their works their particular flavor. Truly understanding them includes study of the language. Music and Opera are international, but they are very important to Germans, partly because they make the classical composers, such as Mozart, Bach, Beethoven and Handel, part of their cultural practice.

Since every major German city has its own opera company and at least one philharmonic orchestra, employment to aspiring American performers and musicians is another way of connecting the German and American cultures.

Studying German

German is no harder to learn to speak and write than other languages. A knowledge of German gets the student closer to not only rich literary, philosophical, artistic and scientific traditions but also to many other kinds of contemporary connections. Because of the common root, studying German will help students understand and use English much better.

German will not only make culture and the arts more accessible, speaking and understanding German will also improve employment opportunities in these areas.

60 million Americans claim German heritage

In the 1990 census, 60 Million Americans claimed to be descendant from German immigrants. A background from the many German speaking parts of Europe gives students a sense of the world and of history. By studying examples of their forebears' roles in this country they can see how they brought commitment to social and cultural development, and develop a personal attachment both to the language and to the many contributions of this group to this country, for example, when they started Kindergarten, athletic associations, brass bands and many churches. Among many other musical influences, the continental European operetta became the model for the American musical. They also started enterprises from farms to bakeries, butcheries, and mechanical engineering and printing firms. With materials that make this past come alive, educators can not only promote the study of German, they can also help American students to see their own uniqueness and instill pride in the German contribution to American culture.

Studying this connection can generate an untapped source for enthusiasm for German and help students understand the universality of the immigrant experience, a more and more legitimate reason for a focus on the German heritage. Reaching into the community or local area for sources also offers teachers the opportunity to keep things German in the public eye.

German-American studies as a case study for ethnic diversity

In regions of the country where immigration from German speaking parts of Europe was high, this effort connects students to their families' heritage. Educators can guide students to learn more in a self-directed hands-on approach, a part of many school reform initiatives. When students become engaged, they may even get motivated to unearth parts of America's German heritage which lie buried in family and public archives and may learn that Germans were prominent in the history of their own community.

In a larger sense these ethnic studies are also important to students without a German heritage because all ethnic groups shaped the America of the 21st century. More knowledge of this can create respect for all ethnic groups and inspire constructive solutions to any ethnic misunderstanding.

There are very good educational reasons for promoting the German heritage along with the language as an area of study. Having incorporated wave after wave of immigrants, America can provide a unique record toward the search for peaceful cooperation beyond ethnic divides. When it links students to their ethnic identity, this enthusiasm will stay with them for life.

A change from normal school work

Learning German not only opens insights into central Europe's intellectual and economic life, it also integrates fields of study that are otherwise separate parts of the curriculum. When the study of one region is integrated across subject divisions, it allows creative thinking and concept building that can be a welcome change.