Albert Einstein, Franz Kafka, Martin Luther, Karl Marx, Angela Merkel, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Erwin Schrödinger . . . These are just a few of the German speakers who have changed our world. But you don’t have to be Einstein to learn German! (The word “English” comes from an old Germanic tribe called the Angles!) Even a beginning German student will already understand hundreds of words that are similar in English and German, like das Buch, die Mutter, der Apfel, and many more!

Learning German at Centre

Learning German at Centre is an exciting adventure in a culture that has helped shape our modern world. When the great German-speaking poet Rainer Maria Rilke said “Du mußt dein Leben ändern!” (You must change your life!), he was referring to the profound effect that a work of art had elicited in him. Art and literature have transformative powers. Nothing transforms you as much as immersing yourself in another culture.

Learning German opens up a whole new perspective: you will be able to visit, enjoy, study, work, and live in Germany, Austria, or Switzerland, and you will be able to appreciate masterpieces of German literature and works of great philosophers, theologians, and other thinkers in the original language. At the end of a German major, you can reach a level of language skills to begin working for a German company.

Some of the world’s greatest artists and as well as scholars in almost every discipline in the humanities, sciences, and social sciences have come from a strong German tradition. Through 2018, scientists from the three major German-speaking countries won 37 Nobel Prizes in physics, 41 in chemistry, and 33 in medicine, while many laureates from other countries received their training at German universities. 12 German-speaking writers have been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature (including 2009 winner Herta Müller, 2004 winner Elfriede Jelinek, and 1999 winner Gunter Grass), and seven Germans or Austrians have received the Nobel Peace Prize.

German is also a very useful language for business. Germany is a major economic and diplomatic powerhouse. Often seen as one of the leading member states of the European Union, Germany is home to the European Central Bank. Many major international companies have their headquarters in Germany: Adidas, Allianz, BASF, Bayer, BMW, Deutsche Bank, Deutsche Telekom, Henkel, Mercedes-Benz, Merck, SAP, Siemens, Thyssenkrupp, and Volkswagen to name a few.

Your professors in the German program at Centre College believe in helping you to reach both language and cultural fluency through a variety of experiences that integrate German, Austrian, and Swiss culture into the classroom. Indeed, our classrooms reach beyond the walls of Centre in Danville to embrace all of these countries.

Goethe said: “Es ist nicht genug zu wissen, man muß auch anwenden. Es ist nicht genug zu wollen, man muß auch tun.” (It is not enough to know, we must also put into practice. It is not enough to want to, we must also do.) In the spirit of Goethe’s dictum, we enhance our classes with special activities.

The German Club sponsors an informal weekly Stammtisch (conversation table), organizes trips to cultural events and
German restaurants, and helps bring German-language movies to Centre’s campus.

GERMAN COURSES
Our German curriculum seeks to integrate the most fascinating aspects of German-speaking culture with the acquisition of language skills. Each course in the German major focuses on a central question. In Vaterland und Muttersprache we look deeply into historical and contemporary definitions of “Germany” and “German” to understand how complex these notions can be. Other courses investigate German Cultural Geography, deep levels of Advanced German Grammar, and the theme of love in German literature and culture. German Film seeks to better understand the culture, history, politics, social structures, and language of Central Europe through arguably the most important art form of the 20th-century.

STUDY ABROAD
Centre has a special program abroad at the Universität Regensburg. Students can immerse themselves in German university life in this medium-sized northern Bavarian city. Since its inception, German students have also studied as part of the Centre-in-Strasbourg program, hopping on the city’s light rail system to cross the Rhine into Kehl, Germany. Students may also participate in a program sponsored by another institution. Centre faculty also visit German-speaking Europe frequently during the CentreTerm, with many courses featuring the option of German credit. Recently students have chosen to further their German fluency in cities such as Berlin, Freiburg, Munich, and Trier, among others. “Wanderlust” is a wonderful German word that expresses the joys that come from setting out from home and discovering a whole new world. Many German students continue their study of German after they graduate, whether on Fulbrights or as teachers of English.

FULBRIGHTS AND DAAD AWARDS
All faculty members who teach German are Fulbright recipients, and the German Studies program has had outstanding success in recent years assisting students in receiving Fulbright grants to study and teach in Germany and Austria — five German majors from the classes of 2008-2013 received Fulbrights. Other students have received grants from the German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst or DAAD) to expand their knowledge of German in Germany.

FACULTY
CHRISTINA SVENDSEN (Ph.D., Harvard University). Dr. Svendsen joined the Centre College faculty in 2016 as visiting assistant professor of French and German. Her research and teaching interests include comparative modernisms, the writings of Walter Benjamin, and the intersection of literary, architectural, and critical theory. Svendsen earned an A.B. in literature, and an A.M. and Ph.D. in comparative literature from Harvard University; and an M.F.A. in fiction from the University of Virginia.

IAN WILSON (Ph.D., University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill). Dr. Wilson arrived at Centre in 2003. His scholarly interests include contemporary literature, space and place, Austria, and the European Union. He has received two teaching awards while at Centre. He has led students abroad to Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, Hungary, Belgium, and the Czech Republic during four long terms and seven short terms. In 2019, he led a group of Centre students from the beaches of Normandy to Berlin, following the path of the U.S. military in 1944-45, and he oversees the abroad program in Regensburg. In 2020 he will accompany another group of students to Germany.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
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RELATED WEBSITE
German Studies Program Overview

VISIT CENTRE
The best way to judge Centre is to tour the campus, talk to the professors and students, attend a class, and spend the night in a residence hall. We invite you to visit and encourage you to contact the Admission Office if you have any questions.

THE CENTRE COMMITMENT
We back our promise with a deeply engaging and intensely personal education guarantee. If you meet regular academic and social expectations, you will complete all three parts of the Centre Commitment, or the college will provide up to an additional year of study tuition-free.

Centre students will:
• Study abroad
• Have an internship or research opportunity
• Graduate in four years