GERMAN STUDIES

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The major in German Studies covers a broad tradition of more than five centuries in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and neighboring lands. Students gain deep competence in the German language while also reading celebrated literature, analyzing distinctive artworks in many media, deducing intensive theories, and exploring political, linguistic, and cultural histories. The German faculty works closely with undergraduates to develop their special areas of interest within the rich currents of German culture.

German language courses emphasize listening, speaking, reading, and writing in interaction with authentic cultural materials. The curriculum also introduces students to the basic questions and methods of literary criticism, with a focus on rigorous reading practices for a wide range of works from different genres, disciplines, and historical moments.

German Studies courses are diverse in their topics and highly relevant to other fields of study today. Pioneers in philosophy, political theory, sociology, psychology, history, classical philology, the visual arts, architecture, and music wrote and thought in German, as did founders of the modern natural and practical sciences. Majors discover Kant, Goethe, Beethoven, Einstein, Freud, Kafka, Arendt, and many other thinkers and writers who laid the groundwork for modernity and still hold keys to understanding it.

Germany is the fourth-largest economy in the world, and German is the first language of over 95 million people worldwide. Students with a foundation in the language, literature, history, and intellectual revolutions of Germany are prepared to enter a wide variety of vocations. Majors have gone on to postgraduate study in Germany and the United States, and many have entered top-tier law schools and graduate programs. Recent graduates work in fields as diverse as environmental policy, journalism, arts management, consulting, and engineering, as well as in governmental and nongovernmental organizations and businesses.

PREREQUISITES

Prerequisite to the major are first- and second-year German or the equivalent.

COURSE NUMBER

Group A courses Courses in Group A (GMAN 1100–1590) correspond to Yale's L1 to L5 designation of elementary, intermediate, and advanced language courses.

Group B courses Courses in Group B (GMAN 1600-level and 1700-level) are advanced L5 courses. Readings are in German, and the language of instruction is German. There is no restriction on the number of Group B courses that may count toward the major, provided all requirements are met.

Group C courses Courses in Group C (above GMAN 2000) are all other courses. The language of instruction is typically English, but readings may be in German and/or English. Course level and prerequisites vary according to the expectations of the instructors.

PLACEMENT PROCEDURES

An online placement examination is accessible all year. See the department website for details. Students may also consult with the director of undergraduate studies (DUS) or the language program director for advice about placement and about language study. Regardless of previous German study, students without a score of 5 on the German Advanced Placement test must take the departmental placement exam in order to enroll in any course above GMAN 1100 or GMAN 1250.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

See Links to the attributes indicating courses approved for the German Studies major requirements.

Students are held to the requirements that were in place when they declared their major. However, with approval from the director of undergraduate studies, the following requirements, updated for the academic year 2024-2025, may be fulfilled by students who declared the major in a prior term.

The requirements of the major in German Studies consist of ten course credits, including the senior essay. All majors must complete at least one GMAN course numbered in the 1500s, one in the 1600s, and one in the 1700s, plus six additional courses numbered GMAN 1600 and above.

Areas of interest The Yale German Studies program offers a variety of courses. Covered fields include (1) literature, (2) media and media theory, (3) history and politics, (4) critical thought, and (5) aesthetics and the arts. Students are encouraged to select courses based on their preference and may find it rewarding to focus on one or more of these fields. *Literature* courses give students access to worlds of thought and action. Students learn to read critically poetry, novels, plays, short stories, aphorisms, songs, and other genres. *Media and media theory* courses explore a vibrant tradition of experimentation in new cultural forms and media in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Students investigate photography, radio, film, television, and computer media alongside landmark works in media theory. Courses in *History and politics* focus on world-altering historical events and thought-altering theories of history from the Germanic tradition. Students become familiar with explosive political and social events, including the emancipation of the Jews and the Holocaust, the world wars, unification and reunification, and concepts and models for development in economy, social welfare, law, and environmental policies. *Critical thought* focuses on traditions of theoretical reflection on society, history, art, and language. Students become familiar with authors such as Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Benjamin, and Habermas. *Aesthetics and the arts* courses survey the rich Germanic traditions in the visual and musical arts, as well as the philosophical study of art beginning in eighteenth-century Germany.

Credit/D/Fail No more than two courses taken Credit/D/Fail may be applied toward the requirements of the major, with permission of the DUS.

Outside credit Courses taken at another institution or during an approved summer or term-time study abroad program may count toward the major requirements with DUS approval.

SENIOR REQUIREMENT

Seniors in the standard German Studies major enroll in GMAN 4920, a guided senior essay tutorial course. Students meet biweekly with the DUS and staff, and work under the direction of a faculty adviser. The culmination of the tutorial is an essay of approximately thirty pages that gives evidence of careful reading and substantial independent thought. The essay may be written in either English or German, although only native speakers are encouraged to write an essay in German. Seniors typically write the essay during the fall term. A preliminary statement indicating the general area to be addressed and the choice of adviser should be submitted to the DUS by early September; the final essay is judged by the faculty adviser and a second reader. See Senior Essay Deadlines on the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures website for more information.

Intensive major Requirements for the intensive major are the same as for the standard major, except that the intensive major replaces one advanced seminar with a second term of the senior essay. In the fall term seniors in the intensive major enroll in GMAN 4920 and begin work on their project under the guidance and supervision of a faculty adviser. A significant portion of the research for the essay should involve materials in German. The essay may be written in either English or German, although only native speakers are encouraged to write an essay in German. A detailed prospectus, no longer than three pages, and a bibliography must be submitted to the DUS by October 16, 2026. The student must submit a draft of at least fifteen pages of the essay by November 20, 2026, to receive credit for the first term of the course. The second term, GMAN 4930, is devoted to completing the essay, which should be substantial (between fifty and sixty pages); the completed essay must be submitted by April 9, 2027. The senior essay is judged by the faculty adviser and a second reader. See the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures website for more information.

ADVISING

Candidates for the major in German Studies should consult the DUS.

Graduate courses Courses in the Graduate School are open to undergraduates with permission of the instructor and of the directors of undergraduate and graduate studies. Course descriptions may be obtained on the German department website or from the office of the director of graduate studies.

STUDY ABROAD

Students are strongly encouraged to study in Germany for a summer, or for one or two terms on the Year or Term Abroad program. Appropriate course credit toward the major is granted for work in approved programs in Germany. Study abroad is valuable not only for achieving comfortable fluency in German, but also for gaining firsthand knowledge of the German cultural context. The department offers diverse opportunities for study abroad and a scholarship program for summer courses at German universities. Members of the faculty advise and consult with any students wishing to plan study in Germany. Students who have been approved to study abroad and who receive financial aid from Yale are eligible for aid while abroad. For information about the Year or Term Abroad program, see Academic Regulations, section K, Special Academic Programs, “Year or Term Abroad.” Students who study abroad for one term may count up to two courses toward the major, with approval

of the DUS. Students who study abroad for an academic year may count up to four courses toward the major, with approval of the DUS.

SUMMARY OF MAJOR REQUIREMENTS

Prerequisites First- and second-year German or equivalent
Number of courses 10 courses (incl senior req)
Distribution of courses At least 1 GMAN course in the 1500s, at least 1 in the 1600s, and at least 1 in the 1700s; 6 courses (numbered GMAN 1600 and above) from Groups B and C
Substitution permitted With DUS approval, some substitutions and exceptions may be possible
Senior requirement Senior essay tutorial (GMAN 4920)
Intensive major Two-term senior essay (GMAN 4920 and GMAN 4930)