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ABSTRACT

A study commissioned by the German Marshall Fund of the United States examined the status of area studies on contemporary Germany in American postsecondary education. It surveyed 50 institutions concerning the status of teaching and research on contemporary Germany in selected fields of the humanities, social sciences, and professional education. The focus was on departments and schools of German, history, sociology, economics, political science, business administration, law, journalism, and engineering. In addition, the study investigated employment opportunities in the public and private sector for individuals with expertise on Germany, focusing on the adequacy of current resources to meet both present and future demands in those areas. Preliminary findings and conclusions of the study are presented. Among the findings are these: (1) that while there are many excellent academic and research resources and contacts, serious deficiencies in breadth and depth of knowledge exist in certain disciplines; (2) the scope of expertise is often very narrowly defined, if it is considered relevant at all; and (3) shortages are growing in certain kinds of expertise or skill combinations; for example, there is a shrinking supply of qualified German language teachers on the secondary level. (MSE)

AREA STUDIES REVITALIZED: THE CASE OF GERMAN STUDIES

by

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The Study of Contemporary Germany: Problems, Programs, and Possibilities

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During the past year, a study was commissioned by the German Marshall Fund of the United States to determine the status of the study of contemporary Germany at the post-secondary level. The study was designed to examine how educational institutions organize the study of German affairs for the purpose of producing individuals with a broad, in-depth understanding of contemporary Germany.

For the purposes of the investigation, we defined our subject as the study of the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic in the areas of politics, economics, society, and history since 1945, as well as literature and culture in a social and political context.

The study had two main emphases. First, it surveyed the status of teaching and research on contemporary Germany in selected fields of the humanities, the social sciences and in the professional schools. The focus was on the departments of German, history, economics, sociology, and political science, and on the schools of business, law, journalism, and engineering. We surveyed over fifty leading educational institutions around the country to determine if and how contemporary Germany was a part of the individual or cross-disciplinary programs of teaching or research in these fields.

The second emphasis was on the employment opportunities in the public and private sector for those with expertise on Germany. We were particularly interested in the adequacy of our current resources to meet both present and possible future demands in these areas.

We were not surprised to find that there are many excellent academic programs and research facilities and that numerous productive contacts exist between American and West German scholars. In terms of amount of activity and sheer number of people involved, our resources seem more than adequate. Quantity alone cannot suffice, however, and we detected serious deficiencies in both breadth and depth of knowledge in certain disciplinary areas, most notably in some of the social sciences.

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Within the various academic disciplines, the scope of expertise is often quite narrowly defined, while in the professions, in business, law, engineering, and journalism, area expertise is either considered irrelevant or viewed solely as a desirable supplement to functional skills.

Given these findings, we were also not surprised to discover evidence of growing shortages in certain kinds of expertise or combinations of skills. For example, we learned that government agencies are experiencing increasing difficulty in locating people with advanced proficiency in the German language and a thorough understanding of German affairs plus some expertise in security matters. In the private sector, the immediate reward for language and area skills remains for the most part limited, resulting in a vicious circle of sorts between the supply and the demand of skills. Another troubling insufficiency is the shrinking supply of qualified German language teachers on the secondary level. These and other problems indicate that there is not always sufficient correspondence between what is stressed in our academic programs and the skills and background needed for certain careers.

What follows are some of the preliminary findings and conclusions of the report. For the purposes of this article, I have summarized the various assessments of teaching and research on contemporary Germany in the disciplines and professional schools investigated. The second section discusses the results of interviews held with individuals in the public and private sector concerning the demand for expertise on German affairs. The last section contains some of the implications and conclusions drawn from the study.

Assessments of Teaching and Research on Contemporary Germany

Our investigation of the disciplines and professional schools was primarily concerned with the type and extent of scholarship which has contemporary Germany at its center. We began with the German departments, since they play such a central role.

The efforts of German departments to increase the breadth of their undergraduate course offerings seem to have had considerable success in stimulating student interest, as enrollments are in fact on the upswing nationwide. Since the German departments in our survey gave varying explanations for the enrollment increase, however, it cannot be determined to what extent students were attracted to individual new courses, how many were inspired above all by the many recent innovations in language instruction, how many wanted to learn more about their ethnic origins (sometimes called the "roots" factor), and how many became interested in the new German Studies programs. More often than not,

departments reported that the German Studies major turned out to be somewhat more popular than the German literature major, but usually because of particularly energetic professors or student interest in specific new courses rather than because of the program's perceived "usefulness" for specific career goals.

As any German Studies program must depend heavily on course offerings and faculty in other departments, strange gaps in some of the programs suggest that they are drawing on inadequate resources or lack the full cooperation of other departments. Some of the German Studies courses given by German departments are taught in English, apparently disappointing students who hoped to improve their German language skills while gaining knowledge of a subject area. But courses offered only in German exclude all students lacking the language skills. Only quite recently have there been efforts to address such problems of consistency and to standardize course requirements, establish academic criteria, and clarify the long-term purpose of the programs. A group of experts meeting at the October 1985 German Studies Association conference made considerable progress toward such definition and clarification, but more work remains to be done (see preceding article).

In light of these observations, it was particularly instructive to learn how the study of contemporary Germany is--or is not—part of the teaching and research activities of other key departments, and to learn how professional schools respond to the question of language and area studies within their programs.

In the case of history departments, our survey confirmed that the study of Germany is central to history departments, each having at least one faculty member who has specialized in German history. We found that there is a significant number of graduate students working on a topic relating to German history. This suggests that there are many younger scholars pursuing the study of Germany in their advanced research. However, there has been relatively little evidence that the subject of contemporary Germany, i.e., post-1949 FRG or GDR, has been the object of much American scholarly research except within the context of diplomatic history, particularly in connection with the post-war East-West conflict. The majority of courses cited and research emphases indicate a continuing trend toward a focus on the Third Reich period and an increasing interest in the pre-war Weimar period as well as in nineteenth-century Germany among younger scholars. To quote a professor "Our most popular course is the one on NAZI Germany".

There has been some recent increase in work on the immediate post-war period after the release of OMGUS and HICOG records for research and as younger American scholars become familiar with the German work being done on the history of the FRG or the GDR.

Our examination of the fields of economics, sociology and political science shows first of all that there is a great deal of contact between German and American social scientists. With almost all departments reporting that at least one member of the faculty had been in Germany teaching or doing research in the last five years, and that German scholars had visited them, the volume and intensity of contact is significant. Secondly, subject matter about contemporary Germany, primarily the FRG, is reportedly present in teaching in all three fields in varying degrees, although it remains unclear as to what that suggests. An exclusive focus on Germany is rarely found in economics or sociology, but it is more frequent in political science. Thirdly, relatively few graduate students in the social sciences have focused on Germany in their research in recent years. Finally, the GDR as a subject of study was most often found in the field of sociology. The trend in the social sciences has been to incorporate the study of German affairs (and European affairs in general) into the overall methodology of the discipline, far more so than in cases where the focus is on other areas of the world.

An additional observation concerns the study of the FRG and the GDR within the larger Eastern or Western European Studies framework. Just as the study of domestic and international affairs relating to contemporary Germany does not often occur in an integrated fashion, the study of the FRG and the GDR also does not occur frequently in an interrelated manner. This in part is due to the fact that the study of Western and of Eastern Europe are usually isolated from each other, with the GDR occupying a somewhat nebulous position within the latter field.

All of these observations point to a problem in the development of new mixes of teaching and research with regard to contemporary Germany. While there appears to be no lack of social scientists who work on Germany, there are not many who regard themselves as experts on Germany per se. The demands of the disciplines have narrowed the focus on Germany and inhibited the development of scholars both capable of linking domestic and international issues *and* conversant in the language. There is little incentive for this type of mix, and younger scholars find little reward in pursuing such studies.

In our survey of professional schools, we focused on how graduate students might be able to integrate the study of contemporary Germany into their professional training in law, business, journalism, and engineering. In general, we found that such opportunities are rare. The responses indicate that, while such a mixture at the undergraduate level is prevalent, the graduate level leaves little room for studies which go beyond the designated professional curriculum. Exceptions were found, however. Within a number of law schools, visiting German professors, including some from the GDR, are numerous. Interest in German legal

history and affairs is widespread among American scholars. One sees this confirmed in the number of legal scholars from the U.S. applying for Humboldt or Fulbright Fellowships. Should a law student enter these law schools with an interest in German affairs, there are opportunities to pursue that interest, if not within a formal curriculum.

Our review of journalism schools found virtually no evidence that similar activities involving contemporary Germany exist. While certain schools allow a double concentration with other graduate schools, most reported that the students today are most interested in learning about international reporting and new technology.

With regard to programs in Business Administration, we found that at the undergraduate level, there were many instances of programs in which those getting a B.A. in Business would be able to either do a double major with German or German Studies degree, or pursue a certificate in German or German Studies. At the graduate schools of Business, the majority of the MBA programs reported that a wide variety of subject matter about Germany *may* be a part of courses in international business (finance, management, labor relations, marketing, industrial policy) in the form of clinical cases, but the main emphasis is on general skills relevant to international business. Most schools of business incorporate international business subject matter into so-called "functional courses." with only a few with separate international business departments.

Three graduate schools of business we investigated reported special programs in which the study of Germany is emphasized: The Masters in International Business Studies at the University of South Carolina, The Graduate School of International Management (Thunderbird), and the Joseph L. Lauder Institute of Management and International Studies at the University of Pennsylvania Wharton School. In each of these programs, a student picks a track in which he or she concentrates on a certain language. The student must take courses dealing with the country and its region. Both Pennsylvania and the University of South Carolina require an internship in the area in which the target language is spoken.

When asked whether they get requests from corporate recruiters for specialists on Germany (or any other country), a number of business schools answered that people with knowledge of South America and Spanish are sometimes sought out, but Germany was seldom reported. The Business School of the University of South Carolina did report such interest primarily among German corporate recruiters and American corporations with business in Germany. In a study done on the MIBS graduates in the German track at South Carolina over the last eight years, Kate Gillespi reported that for approximately 65% of them their German ability was very important in getting their initial job and for 53% it was important in performing the initial job.[1]

There evidently are many undergraduate programs in which students can and do combine a German language or German Studies major, minor or certificate with a major in business, but most business schools at the graduate level are not interested in providing area-specific training. Only 11% of MBA and 10% doctorate programs do, which 22% of the schools have a language requirement for international business studies at the undergraduate level.

In keeping with the overall trend in business development, there are now more business schools with formal exchange agreements with educational institutions in Japan and China (28 and 31 respectively) than with the Federal Republic of Germany (15). Those in Germany are primarily with departments of economics at major universities.[2]

Engineering schools reported extensive faculty connections between German and American engineering faculties with some graduate and undergraduate student involvement as well. Scholarly exchange is very large in scope and intensity. A few programs exist for undergraduate students to study in the FRG, but it would appear that graduate students are less involved in such programs. A number of reasons were offered to explain this gap. First, graduate students are anxious to complete their training in order to begin their professional careers. Extra time in the form of foreign study or research is looked upon by many as costly. Second, recruitment of engineers by private firms begins when the individuals are still in graduate school, thus increasing the pressure on these students to finish as quickly as possible. Third, if graduate students are not already proficient in German by the time they enter graduate school, they are disinclined to begin language studies, especially in light of the preceding two factors.

Evaluation of the Need for Expertise on Contemporary Germany

A series of round table discussions and individual interviews were carried out with persons from corporations, consulting firms, banks, law firms, and media institutions to explore the perceived need for expertise and knowledge about German affairs as it relates to their operations. We discussed this with Americans whose firms had business dealings with Germany and with Germans who represented German firms. We also interviewed individuals who had been through special programs specializing in German affairs to see how such expertise affected their careers in the private sector.

In general, most employers stated that while the ability of the prospective American employee to speak a foreign language may be interesting to the potential employer, the main prerequisites for being hired

are the functional skills needed in the field. International experience is an important aspect, but if the functional skills are not polished, neither language nor area skills will get the person hired. A specific area expertise, such as knowing Germany well and being fluent in German, was seen by larger firms as only an indication of the person's overall capabilities. Upon beginning a career at a large corporation, it is often unclear where an employee will wind up. Hence, the firm attempts to hire persons with a sound background in a number of functional skill areas.

While the immediate instrumental value of expertise on German affairs was not stressed by the representatives of the larger firms, there was a consensus concerning language capability in general. Many individuals stressed the value of good communication in daily work, regardless of the language. The ability to speak another language, or the experience of having lived in another culture, were seen as part of the general ability of the prospective employee to communicate well. The value of that ability in the business setting was emphasized by individuals who had some training in business skills and a foreign language.

Discussions with German employers revealed two different sets of interests. On the one hand, many in the financial sector stressed the need for language proficiency at the entry and mid-level positions because of interaction with the headquarters during the training process. The head of personnel at Die Deutsche Bank in New York City said that he has *no* trouble finding prospective employees with both functional and language proficiency and that he was getting dozens of unsolicited job applications each year from individuals who could meet such requirements.

On the other hand, other employers downplayed the language and said that it was most important for the employees to demonstrate functional skills. An interviewee from Volkswagen stressed that the company is called "Volkswagen of America," thus implying the American character of the company is most important.

Several individuals stressed the role of German professionals educated in the U.S. They become attractive to U.S. firms interested in setting up a subsidiary in Germany because they are familiar with the American business world and obviously know their own country. U.S. businesses are more inclined nowadays to seek out such individuals than they were twenty years ago when expatriate Americans were preferred. This shift is related to the fact that it has become increasingly expensive to send an upper-level management officer to Germany, especially when the chances to find a German for the job are good.

In the course of our discussions it became clear that companies will not necessarily provide the time or the opportunity for their employees to become area or regional specialists, unless the immediate need is evident. Hence, the problem of someone working in such a firm with area

expertise and language capabilities is to maintain that expertise at a functional level during the time when it is not being utilized.

When American employees are to be sent to Germany, some kind of a preparatory language and culture course is usually provided. It is in this area where several corporate representatives suggested that special needs can be identified. Right now there is little opportunity for an individual to prepare for a longer stay in another country, other than taking a language course at a commercial institution. But since most American managers are given responsibility for more than one country and may stay in a given country only for a relatively short time, the level of motivation to immerse oneself in the culture is perhaps not as great as it might be for those planning on a longer stay. Hence, according to one manager, the advantage of having someone already equipped with language and area skills is clear: such a person needs less time and money to put these skills to work when they are needed. But it is not always clear when and how that will occur.

Discussions were also held with representatives in government institutions. It was pointed out by those in the intelligence and research areas that only a very small number of individuals are specifically hired as experts in one area or region. Often such individuals remain in the positions for a long period of time. Others moved through a number of areas. While there was some criticism expressed about the allegedly haphazard fashion in which the Foreign Service or the intelligence services use individual resources, it was nevertheless made clear that there is a need to improve the background training in terms of area and language expertise for those considering the foreign service.

Instructors at the Foreign Service Institute indicated that background knowledge about Europe in general and Germany in specific is much more limited today than it was ten or fifteen years ago. This decline was explained by the alleged decline in the status of education and training in these areas in the universities.

Those interviewed at the CIA, DIA, NSA, and NSC indicated that the information needs of the intelligence organizations vary daily and are operational in character. There is little opportunity to do comprehensive studies. However, when such information is required, the need is for a kind of "snap-shot", as one person put it, which allows for a general profile to be seen. In asking the interviewees whether they had access to such "snap-shots," many said that the resources were there, if not always well organized. One official indicated that there ought to be a better network of communication between the government and scholarly circles working on such issues as German affairs. Yet, in his opinion, the scholarly community is frequently working on a different mix of questions and interests than those of importance to the foreign policy-

making operations. While this is perfectly understandable and even desireable in one sense, there is a need to draw on certain academic resources which might be useful to enlarge the perspective of those in an operational environment. A former member of the NSC said that he had organized inter-departmental meetings on German affairs and found that each department was understandably focused on its own concerns, without knowing the implications of its interests for other organizations concerned with German affairs. It was also observed that there was insufficient awareness in government circles about people in academia who could be helpful in dealing with Germany. Government officials stressed that among derived skills in potential employees, language proficiency ranked high in all cases. Expertise in German affairs should be combined with knowledge of U.S. foreign policy and the broader contextual understanding of Europe. One person at the USIA observed that those working on German affairs have either a German language background or have studied some aspects of German domestic politics, but they rarely also have a good understanding of U.S. foreign policy and U.S.-German relations.

Conclusions

(1) There is a large network of contacts and exchanges among senior American and West German scholars and students in many fields.

(2) Among graduate students and junior scholars, concentration on German affairs is less rewarded for purposes of job hunting and promotion than acquisition of theoretical and functional and/or professional skills.

(3) In the professional schools (law, business, journalism, engineering), the incentives for faculty and students to include a focus on a specific country are minimal. Expertise in language and/or area knowledge is viewed as a marginal advantage for job seekers.

(4) Most private sector employers are primarily interested in general functional skills and consider language/area studies a plus, but not a prerequisite. When they require specific expertise in German affairs, they either organize it themselves, hire commercial services, or hire a German. Language proficiency is the most important aspect of area expertise for the private sector employer.

(5) The government is not going to have a large number of jobs available for specialists on German affairs. Many government jobs require a combination of skills, such as a combination of security, trade, or other

policy-related issues with a general understanding of German and other European views and policies on these matters.

(6) The study of German affairs is a part of the framework of European Studies (East and West), but there appear to be few instances where the study of the FRG and/or the GDR is a central component of such programs at the advanced level.

(7) Language capability is central to all the possible applications of expertise in contemporary German affairs, but the status of German language teaching and proficiency is not good.

In light of the present trends cited above, there is a danger that we will soon have fewer specialists at universities teaching about contemporary Germany in other than the traditional fields of history and German. There appears to be no reward system to pursue the study of contemporary Germany at the advanced level in other areas. With few exceptions, we have not developed methods for linking expertise in German affairs to professional needs in the public and private sectors. Interest and information about German affairs is evident, if very specific and narrow in focus.

It seems evident that the ability to integrate the tools of language, of political, economic, and cultural understanding of German affairs with assessments of political, business, economic, or security policies requires stronger institutional cooperation and greater incentives for both faculty and students.

[1]Kate Gillespie, "Foreign Languages and International Business: The MIBS Program after Ten Years," Foreign Language Annals 18 (1985): 47–51