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All Things German: For Arne Koch The Classroom Is Just The Beginning

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All Things German

For Arne Koch the classroom is just the beginning

“*Gott und die Welt*” or “God and the world.” That neatly sums up the range of subjects Arne Koch, Colby German Department chair and associate professor, can expect to talk about when students drop in on one of the department kaffeeklatsches. Discussions take place in German or some English/German hybrid and focus on anything from soccer and Nazis to the current Greek financial crisis.

For Koch, an energetic proselytizer of German culture, it’s crucial for students to understand that learning foreign languages doesn’t take place only in the classroom. “Ideally, it’s a 24/7 immersive experience,” he said.

That experience might include screenings of a film by German director Wim Wenders, time at the German language table at Foss dining hall, or even competition in singing contests between Colby’s language departments. Students looking for downtime can find it at one of Koch’s game evenings, held at his home, complete with Scrabble and desserts concocted by his wife, Hilary.

And Koch is just as engaging on social media. “I add to the proliferation of posts on Facebook,” he said. “It’s a way of reaching students when I don’t see them.” He’s even managed to keep alumni involved. An announcement that Kara Witherill ’15 had won a Fulbright drew a quick response from Susannah Hufstader ’12, a Fulbright winner herself: “The legacy goes on.”

Koch’s own scholarship, including study of cats in German culture, has led to seminars examining human/animal relations. “Cats are not as easily understood as dogs and are

constantly redefined over time—deified, sexualized, made innocent,” said Koch. His enthusiasm for German popular culture has led to articles about Turkish-German filmmaker Fatih Akin and Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke as well as one cowritten with Sei Harris ’10 about the German krautrock group Faust. Published in 2009 in *Popular Music and Society*, it grew out of a class Koch taught on literary and filmic representations of Berlin and Vienna.

Koch mines Germany’s cultural past with his humanities lab class Dark and Grimm Fairy Tales, based on the first edition of the Grimm brothers’ oeuvre. In these early stories, he explained with relish, “Eyes get picked out by birds, toes get cut off to fit into shoes, heels get scraped off.”

A project at Waterville’s Mount Merici Academy was an offshoot of the class. Koch’s students explored the fables with fourth graders, using marionettes and creating modern versions. Despite their darkness, Koch claimed, the tales are “all about order, which gives the kids comfort.”

Along with his other projects, the Colby-Bates German Virtual Library (villy.colby.edu) and the work he’s done on it are points of pride for Koch. The result is a database of more than 200 texts for teaching and learning German that includes a glossary to the texts and tagging and identification for linguistic relevance.

Just as important to Koch is the collaboration between faculty and students: “You can engage students from the beginning,” he said. “You have them from the moment they come as prospective students.”—Pat Sims

Associate Professor of German Arne Koch congratulates a student who received a department award last spring. Koch makes German a “24/7 immersive experience.” To view Center for the Arts and Humanities multimedia projects go to colby.edu/centerartshumanities/center-multimedia/



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— Associate Professor of German Arne Koch