In our world of global communication and travel, language specialists find themselves constantly in demand. German involves the study of a language that is closely related to English. German culture and creativity form much of the Western heritage in music, visual art, architecture, philosophy and the sciences. It’s easy to see that the study of German can enhance the study of many other disciplines.

German is one of the world’s major European languages and one of the two principal languages of Europe. Germany is one of the world’s largest contributors to research and development, and its well-funded universities are an important destination for scientists and students. Knowledge of German language and culture has long been an asset in Europe but it is also a major advantage within New Zealand.

“Learning another language provides you with an invaluable skill set, one that will differentiate you from the pack. Combined with any degree, it will open up opportunities to travel and work around the world.”

Alexander Komarovsky
BCom International Business, BA Economics, DipLang German

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Why Study German?

Today, there are more reasons to study German than ever before. German is the most commonly spoken language in the European Union. Germany is Europe’s largest economy, the world’s third largest exporting nation, an influential member of the European Union, and a key player at the United Nations.

German speakers have left a trace on every aspect of Western culture: music, literature, art, theatre and film, architecture and philosophy.

Top reasons to study German

Business: Communicating with German business partners in their own language creates better, more effective relationships – and a greater chance of success.

Careers: Knowledge of German makes you a more attractive choice for German companies – active in virtually every corner of the global market.

Tourism: Since German tourists travel widely and spend more money than any other national group, there is always a demand for language skills in this important sector.

Research: German is the second most important language in scientific research and Germany’s overall contribution to research and development ranks number three in the world. Germany is an important source of research scholarships for foreign academics and students.

Communication: Developments in media and technology have made multi-lingual communications skills more crucial than ever before.

Intercultural understanding: Learning German will give you an insight into the lives of people in some of Europe’s most diverse and multicultural societies.

Travel: By broadening your knowledge of German you will open up opportunities for travel not just in Germany, Austria and Switzerland but also in other parts of Europe, especially Eastern Europe.

Culture: German is the language of some of the greatest artists, writers, poets, musicians and philosophers who have ever lived. Studying German gives you a chance to experience their work directly in the original language.

Study and work in Germany: Every year German organisations award a large number of scholarships for study in Germany. You will also improve your chances of obtaining a work visa for Germany if you can demonstrate good language skills.

Germany and New Zealand

The first German settlers arrived in New Zealand in the 1840s and some of the most important early scientific explorations were carried out by them. At present Germany is New Zealand’s seventh biggest bilateral trading partner and our most important economic partner in the European Union.

The links between the two countries are also strong in research and education. The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) offers generous scholarships for New Zealand students of many different disciplines, ranging from the sciences to the humanities.

Studying German at Otago

German is taught through a communicative approach, enabling students to use the language actively from day one. You will have many opportunities to improve your language skills at all levels – in class, online and in more informal learning environments. Our classes are small and this helps us to get to know our students. We also offer a variety of extra-curricular activities, such as the German play, which has been a very popular tradition in our programme for over 60 years.

Apart from studying the German language, you can also choose papers that will give you a perspective on the social values and cultural life of Germany.

Different entry points

You can study German at any level. If you have studied German at school or elsewhere, you will be able to build on your knowledge and skills, and the Department will determine which paper will best suit your level of German. Otherwise, a popular programme of intensive language training is available for complete beginners.

Majors, minors and diplomas

German is a major of the Bachelor of Arts (BA), a three-year degree programme. You can also graduate with a minor, or a Diploma in German Language, or a Diploma in German Language and Culture while completing your degree in a different major or degree. Students who are interested in conducting further research on German language and culture can join our Honours, MA or PhD programmes.

Student Exchange

The University of Otago offers an international exchange programme that is of particular benefit to language students. You may spend one or two semesters at one of Otago’s partner universities in Heidelberg, Tübingen and Leipzig. You pay only your New Zealand fees, and complete your qualification within the same time-frame as if you had never been away. Competitive scholarships are available to support students on exchange.

Career Opportunities

A BA with a major in German will open job opportunities in both the private and public sectors – in business, trade, consultancy, tourism, education, as well as in foreign affairs and other government agencies. Recent Otago graduates who have included German in their degree now work as consultants, marketing managers, journalists, teachers and librarians, all around the world. German Studies graduates are generalists and have many transferable skills. Your ability to analyse and communicate effectively as well as the international perspectives that you will have gained by studying German at Otago will certainly give you an edge.

Combining another degree with German as a minor or as a Diploma also increases students’ options in the job market. Increasingly, studies in law, commerce, international business and communications are enhanced when you can offer cultural experience or language skills alongside your major area of study.

The true, original reason why I studied German, was in the hope of one day becoming a spy, as I had read loads of war comics about British and American soldiers infiltrating the Nazi ranks. The reasons I’ve kept studying German are naturally quite different.

The variety of subjects offered by the friendly German programme staff fascinated me. From the snippets of the literary greats in GERM 141, the history of German cinema, to the making of our own soap opera and documentary in GERM 331, I loved it all. Not that everything was easy, but when you see what you can do once you know your grammar and vocab, it all fits together.

One of the most memorable experiences was my first stint in the annual German play in my first year. To my surprise, I was chosen for the lead role in Kafka’s Die Verwandlung (The Metamorphosis). This role opened my eyes to the world of theatre, for which German culture is especially rich. But best of all were the friendships I developed with the cast. The German play created a fun environment to get to know people outside the classroom. That’s why I keep coming back for more.

Another especially great way to flex your linguistic skills is going on exchange. I went on a semester exchange to Heidelberg University, which counted towards my Honours thesis. I lived and studied on campus amongst the old cobbled streets and buildings of the Romantic era. It became my mission to absorb as much as I could. I made heaps of friends, went on daily ventures to the bakery, and soaked in the culture and language with gusto.

Studying a language doesn’t just have to be a hobby, it can be a way of life. Knowing two or more languages alters your life because it gives you insights into so many new and different facets of other countries and cultures. Whether it’s the food, the people, the literature, or the history. As New Zealand is such a popular destination for Germans, the job market for Kiwis speaking German is growing.