

Meeting Summary
GLCA Languages Listening and Visioning
Oberlin College
August 11-14, 2019

Executive Summary

The GLCA Languages Listening and Visioning meeting was held on the campus of Oberlin College August 11-14, 2019 hosted by Elizabeth Hamilton (Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and Associate Professor of German) and Gabriele Dillmann (GLCA Shared Languages Director and Associate Professor of German, Denison University). The meeting brought together 31 faculty members from nine GLCA schools¹ and ten language programs. The purpose of the meeting was to share thoughts and experiences regarding modern and classical language programs at small liberal arts colleges and to collectively envision ways GLCA language faculty could collaborate to mutual benefit. The conversations within the language groups and in the plenary sessions were honest, open-minded, and wide-ranging. There was broad agreement that GLCA language faculty would benefit from collaboration and that there are multiple forms that could take. The meeting included a workshop by Simon Gray (GLCA Program Officer) on collaboration across GLCA schools, a workshop by Abe Reshad (Director of Language Technology and Academic Support, Oberlin College) on managing files on Google Drive, and a hands-on workshop by Gabriele Dillmann on course website creation and on teaching and learning with Zoom. This report summarizes the key takeaways and suggests concrete areas of collaboration that can be pursued with the support of the GLCA.

Workshop Takeaways

Small, often single-person, departments are isolated and limiting.

Language faculty would benefit from the creation of language communities that provide professional development opportunities and a venue for the exchange of ideas.

Students would benefit from expanded course offerings and exposure to other students and faculty members, as well as a greater variety of teaching styles.

Digital technology offers multiple and attractive means for facilitating collaboration in language communities.

Most language programs face challenges in attracting and retaining students, and in moving students into advanced-level courses.

Single-person programs face challenges in offering sufficient courses for students to meet major and minor requirements.

Different institutions have different needs – solutions must be adaptable.

¹ Colleagues at Allegheny College contributed detailed written reflections. See discussion on page 3.

Collaboration can take many forms – opening areas for small-scale collaboration will develop familiarity and trust among instructors that could lead to more significant collaboration, including team-taught and shared courses across GLCA institutions.

Faculty need to understand the institutional context of their programs and respond by developing pedagogically strong and economically viable programs.

Multi-year planning will allow language programs to see ways in which they can contribute to their students, programs, and institutions.

Faculty members and administrators must find ways to communicate productively and tackle issues in a shared manner based on building trust and appreciation.

Foundational Collaboration

Share language faculty profiles, including expertise and research interests.

Share course catalog and course schedules for the next two years.

Share syllabi, course materials, rubrics, best practices for promoting language learning.

Convene GLCA language faculty (by language) – perhaps a set of videoconference meetings leading to a physical meeting.

Connect language faculty who are without language peers (e.g. Russian, Portuguese) at partner institutions with language faculty from other less-commonly-taught languages.

Expanded Collaboration

Giving guest lectures, especially in areas of expertise – these might be done live or recorded for later use.

Livestream public lectures with questions submitted online.

Livestream or record presentations from intermediate and advanced students.

Student speech and writing contests to build a stronger community.

Virtual language tables.

Creating and sharing theme-based learning modules/materials.

Shared community-based projects and project-based learning, mostly for advanced students.

Developing student-driven independent studies/private readings that engage language speakers at GLCA institutions.

Developing and offering specialized content courses, e.g. Spanish for the professions (global health, business, translation), Medical Spanish, Legal Spanish, Business German, French Phonology, and so on.

Developing a strategy to talk about the place of languages in a liberal arts environment, including marketing methods and materials.

Developing career-oriented communities to support students seeking internships or employment in which language skills are key.

Offering advanced level courses through the Shared Languages Program.

Prepare and share a seven-week hands-on class, “Navigating yourself in a foreign culture”, based on intercultural communication theory to maximize study abroad experience.

Offer a Winter term class.

Create a summer institute for less commonly-taught languages starting with the elementary level.

Collaborating for oral exams between classes across GLCA campuses.

Sharing "things that worked for me".

Benefits of a Shared Languages Program

While the Shared Languages program was among the topics discussed, it was only one of several ways that faculty members saw themselves collaborating. Thoughtful written reflections from colleagues at Allegheny College (who could not attend the meeting in person) crystalized both the potential for formal course sharing as well as the current professional barriers to doing so. The workshop participants read the Allegheny letter aloud and engaged in nuanced conversation about the issues raised in it. Consensus emerged that if barriers are mitigated or removed, full course sharing can be successful and sustainable. Intermediary projects as outlined above are valuable in their own right and can also contribute to the infrastructure that will sustain full course sharing.

There was consensus on the following advantages to sharing courses across GLCA campuses.

Students get a broader range of courses and can continue to advanced courses – this opportunity may attract more students to the program.

Students in upper level courses benefit from studying with a different set of students.

Students benefit from taking courses from more than one language instructor over the time of their language studies.

Collaboration can allow language faculty to sustain their programs – the ability to continue students vertically and have a broader range of courses to choose from will help keep students in language courses.

Greater flexibility for students to complete lower level classes that close when they reach capacity. These students would take the course from another campus, allowing them to stay on track to take intermediate and advanced level courses at their home institution.

Having students take a regularly scheduled course from another campus frees up a faculty member to teach a specialty course, an elementary language section, or contribute to an institutional program such as the First Year Seminar.

Next Steps

The focus here is on pursuing the Foundational Collaborations. The suggestions under Expanded Collaboration would be pursued within language groups based on interest. The following steps can be taken this fall.

Share language faculty profiles, including expertise and research interests.

- Collect information via a Google Form.

- Organize by language.

- Share in a Google Drive folder – one document per language.

Share course catalog and course schedules for the next two years.

- Get courses catalog in Word or PDF – share in Google Drive folders, one per language.

- Get course schedules in a spreadsheet, sort by language – one spreadsheet per language – course number, course title, term offered, prerequisites, catalog description.

- Work with Registrars at home institutions to include shared courses in institutional catalogs.

Share syllabi, course materials, rubrics, best practices for promoting language learning.

- Initially, we will ask for resources and share via Google Drive. If language groups meet, an agenda item would be what materials are worth collecting and sharing. If there is enough interest, we could justify implementing a more sophisticated way to share. The mechanism for doing that must be an agenda item if a language group meets.

Convene GLCA language faculty by language – initially a set of videoconference meetings leading to an in-person meeting.

- Set parameters: The meeting must have a clear purpose with expected outcomes. The meeting must be limited to two days and one night. GLCA would cover mileage (carpooling expected), meals during the meeting, lodging, the meeting room. Possibly require a minimum number of campuses and faculty attending.

- Create an Expression of Interest form to include: convener, list of participants, purpose, expected outcomes.

Pay close attention to language faculty who are without language peers (e.g. Hebrew, Portuguese) and facilitate introductions to language faculty from other less-commonly-taught languages at partner institutions. Prompt collaboration across different languages to support development of pedagogy and curricula in one-person programs.