

German Major Kaput

By Emily Sachs

Administrators recently finalized their decision to eliminate the German major as an option for Clark undergrads. Financial considerations and decreasing enrollment are to blame.

Hartmut Kaiser, who has been teaching German at Clark since 1971, says that the dropping enrollment in German programs is a national trend that Clark has not escaped.

In the last five years, the number of German majors at Clark has wavered between none and two per year. Meanwhile, Spanish majors are at a five-year high and overall numbers of Foreign Language majors are up. Last fall, 40 students were majors in the department.

William Ferguson, chair of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, is sorry to see the program go, although the elimination is not a surprise. "They've talked about it for years," he says. "Language classes are small, but they should be."

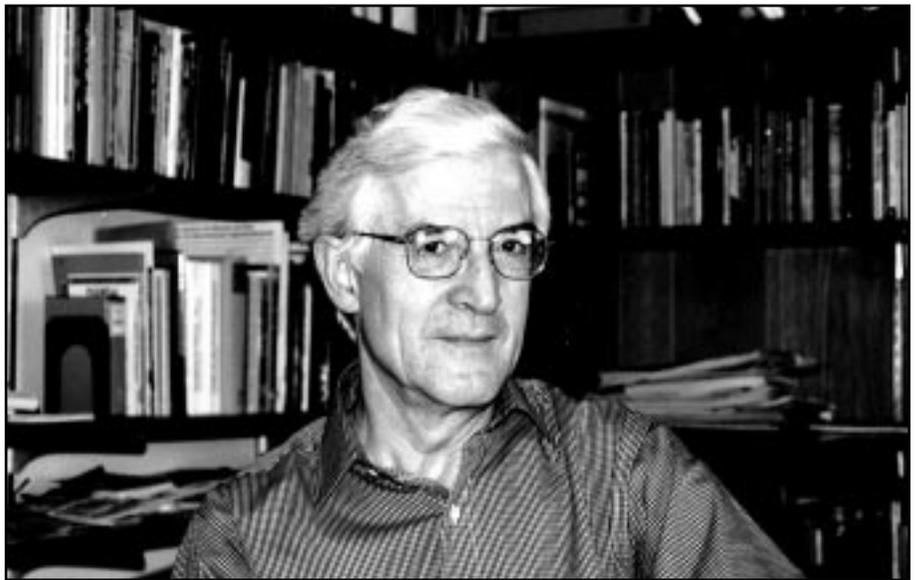
He says that the three full-time German professors are all nearing retirement and in the meantime will branch out into Holocaust studies and comparative literature courses, among others. Introductory German classes for the language perspective will continue to be offered.

In addition, the students who have already declared their major or minor in German will still be able to complete their studies.

Study abroad will still offer their program in Trier, Germany. In fact, three students will be spending all of next year in Germany through Clark's program, and another will be spending a semester there.

Kaiser plans to continue teaching his "Brothers Grimm" first-year seminar as well as two Aesthetic Perspectives and a Comparative Perspective. "In that sense I will continue to teach humanities... for the general population, not just German majors."

The professor laments the fact that he may not be able to teach as effectively, though. Using texts in their original German form and teaching in his native German would be optimal.



Hartmut Kaiser, professor of German

Ferguson, a Spanish professor, thinks the elimination says a lot about Clark's overall commitment to the arts. "It's maybe symbolic of their attitude towards the humanities and liberal arts. I hate to say that, but that's what I believe," he says.

Despite the waning popularity of the German major, its elimination raises questions about Clark's ability to balance economics with education. "Many people are upset," Kaiser explains. "It's really too bad that we've reached a point that the financial considerations determine the character of the academic program to some extent."

Meanwhile, the university indicates that economics—especially supply and demand—played a large part in the decision.

"We have the responsibility of managing our resources as effectively as we can when there is so little demand for this kind of major," explains Richard Traina, university president.

Traina stresses, however, that there is not a systematic elimination of majors at Clark. "Clark tries to do supremely well a limited number of things extremely well," he says, relaying a quote once written about the University. "I think that's a great motif for the university."

Nevertheless, some remain unconvinced.

"I regret that we don't have a German major anymore," says Kaiser. "German has lots to offer. It's hard for me to conceive of a successful... liberal arts university without a German program."