Newsletter 2026

UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT of GERMANIC LANGUAGES & LITERATURES

Interview with **Cora Schenberg**, Associate Professor Emerita

Cora Schenberg, celebrated teacher and beloved colleague was the editor of the German Department Newsletter for many years, and we wanted to start this newsletter with her insight and reflection on 40 years of teaching at UVA. This interview was conducted by Marcel Schmid, this year's editor of the newsletter.

You grew up in New York City, went to Vassar for undergrad, and to UVA for graduate school. What was your experience with the north-south transition into graduate school?

It was hard at first. Charlottesville in 1986 was a very different place from the hopping town of today. There were no good places to eat at the time, which was rough on my husband Wade and me as city people. Also, I am a creature of habit and take a while to adjust to a new place. But eventually, Wade and I found/made a great home here in Charlottesville. We are ensconced in the university and greater Charlottesville communities, as well as in our synagogue, and, since our son grew up here, we've found longtime friends through him. We now consider ourselves fully at home.

You taught at UVA for 20+ years. In your experience, how did teaching change over the course of those years?

A partial correction: I taught at UVA for 30+ years, nearly 40, if you count my TA!

On a positive note, I found it great to see an increase of international and minority students over the years–though I fear that trend may not continue.

But the most obvious change is to me, the saddest: the decline in student interest in and administrative support for the humanities and social sciences. Some years ago, the administration eliminated our department's Ph.D. program. While I felt this loss personally, having received my degree here, this cut deprived ary prospective graduate students of the opportunity to work with our excellent faculty. Moreover, for nearly a decade, I served as an advisor to incoming first year undergraduates. Many, if not most, of my advisees increasingly viewed their liberal arts "gen ed" requirements as an obstruction en route to their goal of admission to the MacIntire School of Commerce. On the one hand, I know that our business school is excellent and understand the desire for a more "practical" major, especially with today's high costs of a university education. However, I continue to believe in the mission of the liberal arts, to help students widen the perspective of their knowledge and become better critical thinkers.

Other changes I could also mention are Google Translate and AI. I'll only say that their advent makes me pleased to have retired.

What are your fondest memories of teaching at UVA?

The above said, I've worked with some great students! This past summer, for example, I taught in the Summer Language Institute (SLI), with my friend and colleague Stefanie Parker. This group of students came to German with interests ranging from history to politics, music, philosophy, and economics. All of them brought excellent observations to class, asked great questions, and worked together beautifully. And since these students knew how to work and play hard, we also laughed a lot. Students in another language class heard us and told our students they wished they could have as much fun!

I've also enjoyed hanging with my teaching and administrative colleagues between classes and outside of class. I consider myself very fortunate in having cool people to work with.

In German we differentiate between "Beruf" (job) and "Berufung" (calling). You recently retired from your "Beruf," but how is your "Berufung" as author fit into your future plans?

Yes, when not hanging with friends and family, I have found time for writing! Shortly after retiring in December, I learned that my favorite instructor, Lisa Cooper Ellison, was offering a workshop for re-writing memoirs. This was great news, since I've known since completing my first draft that my memoir needs a complete overhaul. I've enjoyed the challenges of re-writing, as well as getting to know the other participants in our class, excellent writers all.

Student Highlights

Lincoln Day graduated in Spring 2026 with a B.A. in German and Classics. He is currently pursuing a PhD in German Studies at Yale University and hopes to become a professor of German Literature after completing his program.

Pamela Green graduated in spring 2026 with a double Major in German and Biochemistry and is currently working as a full-time quality control scientist at Eli Lilly in Indianapolis, Indiana. Pamela plans to apply to medical school and study Spanish abroad in the future.

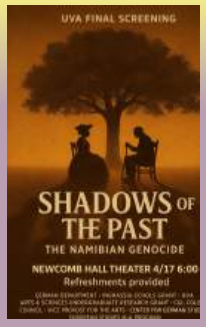
Matthew Forys Jr. graduated this spring in the class of 2026 as a Politics and German double major. He is exploring whether to pursue a career in law, public policy, or sustainable development as he spends the next nine months as an English teaching assistant in Austria. He hopes to take what he has learned from his international opportunity this year and practically apply it in his professional field, by emphasizing the diversity in approaches to universal issues that span continents, such as resource scarcity or the displacement of peoples.

Colin Buchanan will graduate this fall 2026 with a Bachelor of Arts double major in German and Economics. Colin just accepted a conditional invitation to serve as an English teacher in Albania for the Peace Corps to pursue a career in the U.S. Department of State.

Elise Orr graduated in spring 2026 with degrees in German and Global Security & Justice, along with a minor in Leadership and Public Policy. She is currently working as an intern at the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA). In late September, she will move to Austria to begin a Fulbright USTA teaching assistantship in Tyrol. Longer term, she plans to pursue a master's degree in Transatlantic Affairs, Diplomacy, or International Relations and build a career in international security, foreign policy, and transatlantic relations.

Leela Trujillo is a fourth-year German and Global Studies double major. She works with the **German Department as a TA** and is the Co-Chair of the Resident Staff Program, where she works with the 300 RAs at UVA. She also assists in UVA's Volunteers for International Students and Staff program, helping international TAs acclimate themselves to American college. In her free time, she loves to read, watch movies, and go stargazing on clear nights.

Student Research Highlight



Shadows of the Past: The Namibian Genocide

The documentary project conducted by **Pamela Green** and advised by Marcel Schmid aimed at increasing awareness and discussion of the Namibian genocide by German colonizers, which eradicated 80% of the Herero and Nama people between 1904 and 1908. After successfully raising $13,000 from 6 UVA grants and 1 grant from the German Embassy, Pamela and her sister **Teairrah**, a VCU film major, embarked on a 10-day field trip to Namibia where they interviewed activists and the descendants of survivors. The project resulted in a 27-minute **documentary film** that was accepted into 8 film festivals and a 170-page **book**.

Faculty Highlights

The German Department welcomes **Dirk Johnson**, Elliott Professor Emeritus of German at Hampden-Sydney College, who graciously agreed at the very last minute to join us this fall. Prof. Johnson double-majored in German and history, at Bowdoin College, and studied at the University of Munich in 1983–84. After graduating, he spent seven years working and studying in Bonn, earning a Magister in political science, philosophy, and German from the University of Bonn in 1989. Johnson returned to the United States in 1992, working in New York City before beginning doctoral study at Indiana University in 1994. He completed his Ph.D. in German Studies in 2000, and in 2001 he joined the faculty of Hampden-Sydney College, retiring from teaching there in 2026.

His research on Nietzsche and Darwin has appeared in peer-reviewed journals; his monograph, *Nietzsche's Anti-Darwinism*, was published by Cambridge University Press in 2010. Alongside this work, he has written and presented on German film, including a contribution to a 2014 University of Kentucky Press volume on *The Lives of Others*.

The past year brought several important developments for **Manuela Achilles**. In fall 2025, she was appointed Professor of German and History, and in January 2026 her book Invisible Fatherland: Constitutional Patriotism in Weimar Germany appeared with Cambridge University Press. The book recovers a democratic political culture that was more substantial and more deeply rooted than the republic's eventual collapse has often allowed us to see. Achilles presented work from the book at the Annual Meeting of the German Studies Association in fall 2025 and contributed to a collaborative forum on "What is Weimar?" accepted for publication in Contemporary European History. This fall, she will co-host a three-day seminar on "Weimar Today" at the annual German Studies Association Conference.

As Director of the Center for German Studies, and through 2025, of the European Studies M.A. Program, Achilles continued to foster connections across German and European Studies at UVA, organizing lectures, workshops, exhibitions, and student events with scholars and public partners, including the German Embassy. Together with the German Department's events expert, Gina Hutton, and CGS program assistant Leela Trujillo, she organized a holiday gathering in the Amphitheater that brought faculty, students, and friends together over seasonal warm drinks, cookies, music, and decoration-making.

Together with Peter Debaere, Achilles also continued her public-facing work, drawing on Albert Hirschman to explore the return of economic power politics and co-editing a special issue of Global Europe on "Eurovision: A Vision for Europe?" She will use her directorship leave in fall 2026 to work on her next book on Hitler and the Holocaust, which is under contract with Bloomsbury Academic.

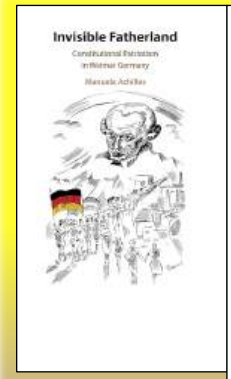
In fall 2025, **Paul Dobryden** taught a new course on body horror, a type of horror film widely discussed most recently in relation to *The Substance*. While on research leave in the spring, he completed articles that will be published in the inaugural issue of the journal *German Screen Studies;* the *Disability and Horror Handbook;* and a special issue of the journal *Studies in European Cinema*, which he is co-editing with Ervin Malakaj (University of British Columbia). He also successfully applied for funding from UVA's Institute of the Humanities and Global Cultures to start the Disability Studies Lab, which he will co-chair with Elizabeth Ellcessor (Media Studies) and Martina Svyantek (UVA Library). The Lab will run for two years and start hosting events in this fall. This summer, Prof. Dobryden delivered a keynote lecture at the conference "Rethinking Weimar Cinema," organized by the German Screen Studies Network in the UK and held at Worcester College at the University of Oxford. He also conducted research for a new project at the Deutsche Kinemathek in Berlin.

Last year, **Lorna Martens** found out from her publisher that her recent book, *As Told by Herself: Women's Childhood Autobiography 1845-1969* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2022), had been translated into Russian. For those who would prefer to read the book in Russian, the title is
Ее словами: Женская автобиография 1845-1969 / Лорна Мартенс; пер. с англ. Amost . Фоменко. — М.: Новое литературное обозрение, 1924. — 344 с. (Серия «Гендерные исследования»). Lorna also served last fall as the Presiding Officer of the standing session Autobiography at the 2025 PAMLA. Besides chairing the first of two Autobiography panels, she presented a paper related to the PAMLA conference theme, Memory, on a novel she has often taught in her course "Memory Speaks": Patrick Modiano's prizewinning *Missing Person*. *Missing Person* tells a story of amnesia, lost identity, and recovery. Lorna's paper examined these themes from the perspective of contemporary scientific memory theory.

Bill McDonald is on sesquicentennial leave in Fall, 2026, but will be returning to teaching in January 2027. Some of his major academic essays form the past year include: "Apropos the Literary Reception of Seneca's Locution *Otium sive litteris, etc.* (*Epistulae Morales* 82:3) in André Favyn's *Le théâtre d'honneur et de chevalerie* (1620)," forthcoming in *Terminus: Journal of Early Modern Literature and Culture*, and underway is a study: "*l'eſcript Sigebert en ſa Chronique*: On the Reception, in Seventeenth-Century France, of an Arthurian Dictum, attributed to Sigebert of Gembloux."

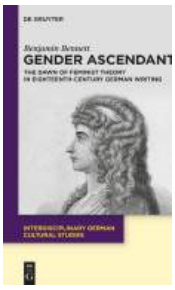
Marcel Schmid, Director of Undergraduate Programs and Language Coordinator of the German Department, is serving a three-year term as the Daniels Family Distinguished Teaching Associate Professor (National Endowment for the Humanities). He will be working on courses and course design recommendations on how to support first-generation students in entry level humanities courses. Marcel is also serving as the Interims Director of the Center for German Studies.
He is currently co-editing a volume titled *Humanities Under Fire – Reorienting Usefulness* that is under contract with Palgrave Macmillan, and he is working on a book project on car culture.

New Faculty Books



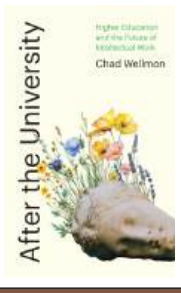
Manuela Achilles: Invisible Fatherland: Constitutional Patriotism in Weimar Germany (Cambridge University Press, 2026)

Weimar Germany is often remembered as the ultimate political disaster, a democracy whose catastrophic end directly led to Adolf Hitler's rise. Invisible Fatherland challenges this narrative by recovering the nuanced and sophisticated efforts of Weimar contemporaries to make democracy work in Germany-efforts often obscured by the Republic's eventual collapse. In doing so, **Manuela Achilles** reveals a unique form of constitutional patriotism that was rooted in openness, compromise, and the capacity to manage conflict. Authoritative yet accessible, Invisible Fatherland contrasts Weimar's pluralistic democratic practices with the rigid tendencies in contemporary thought, including Rudolf Smend's theory of symbolic integration and Karl Löwenstein's concept of militant democracy. Both theories, though influential, restrict the positive potential of open, conflict-driven democratic processes. This study challenges us to appreciate the fundamental fluidity and pluralism of liberal democracy and to reflect on its resilience in the face of illiberal and authoritarian threats-an urgent task in our time.



Benjamin Bennett: Gender Ascendant. The Dawn of Feminist Theory in Eighteenth-Century German Writing (De Gruyter, 2026)

Does feminist theory—the theoretical grasp of exactly how a patriarchal oppression of women operates and has operated in Western societies—arise simply as women's response to the experience of oppression? Bennett argues that no such substantial current of thought ever arises in this manner, and that feminist theory is not truly grasped until we uncover in intellectual history the not-yet-feminist body of thought from which it emerges. He approaches this matter by discussing an anti-aesthetic tendency in the work of major eighteenth-century German authors, both male and female, a tendency which develops (he claims) in the direction of proto-feminism. Especially notable is the *kind* of feminist theory in question here, a theory which focuses uncompromisingly on the hardest possible problems it encounters: on a gender-based logic by which women writers, precisely in asserting themselves as women, run up against an imperative of silence; on the recognition that in a strictly ethical feminist view, gender difference is inaccessible to the understanding; and on the problem of a future for feminism in a world where the aesthetic approach to art and literature has apparently prevailed once and for all.



Chad Wellmon: After the University. Higher Education and the Future of Intellectual Work (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2026)

When the pursuit of knowledge is eclipsed by money and power, what remains of higher learning?

What is a university for? Is it a sanctuary for disciplined study, or has it become something else entirely? In *After the University*, Chad Wellmon traces the long and often uneasy relationship between higher learning and the institutions that claim to protect it. Moving from the guilds of medieval Paris and the knowledge factories of Enlightenment-era Göttingen to the research empires of Berlin and Berkeley, Wellmon shows how the modern university has repeatedly reshaped itself to serve shifting social and political demands.

Across centuries, the goods of disciplined study—the joy of reading, the virtues of intellectual rigor, and the possibility of self-formation—have been overshadowed by the pursuit of external rewards such as money, prestige, and power. Part institutional history and part philosophical reflection, After the University examines how today's institutions defend themselves not in the name of learning but in the language of productivity, innovation, and economic utility. Drawing on his experiences as a scholar, teacher, administrator, and witness to crises such as white supremacist marches and the COVID-19 pandemic, Wellmon illustrates how universities justify themselves through the outputs of graduates, research discoveries, and workforce training while leaving unmentioned the very practices that once defined them.

Despite this transformation, Wellmon argues that the university's current state of turmoil exposes a new, enticing possibility: recognizing the practices of disciplined study as goods worth valuing in and of themselves rather than simply as means to other ends. With insight and urgency, *After the University* asks whether our institutions can still nurture intellectual desire—or whether we must find new homes for the life of the mind.

Administration News

Gina Hutton just celebrated 20 years with the German department while also supporting several other language departments here in Arts & Sciences. With her dedicated service, extensive experience, reliability, and a strong commitment to our department, Gina has become an integral part of keeping things organized and moving forward. She is the person behind the scenes making sure the many details get taken care of and, after 20 years, the department might just wonder what it would do without her. Thank you, Gina!

German Department Directory

Chair: ***Chad Wellmon*** Commonwealth Professor of German and English

Director of Undergraduate Studies, Language Coordinator (2000 level+): ***Marcel Schmid*** Daniels Family Distinguished Teaching Associate Professor, Associate Professor, General Faculty

Language Coordinator (1000 level): ***Chrisann Zuerner*** Assistant Professor, General Faculty

Max Kade German House at Shea & German Summer Language Institute Director: ***Stefanie Parker*** Associate Professor, General Faculty

German Department TA: ***Leela Trujillo***

Travel, Purchasing, and Events Administrator: ***Gina Hutton***

Student Affairs Administrator: ***Sandy Kendrick***

Financial and Personnel Administrator: ***Anne Zook***

GERMAN Majors and Minor

How can you major or minor in German?

Either: To major or minor in German, a student must complete courses through German 2020 (or equivalent). Essential courses: GERM 1010, GERM 1020, GERM 2010, GERM 2020

Or: Students who score out of 2000 level classes may also commence work towards the major. See placement chart under: https://german.as.virginia.edu/german-placement-chart

In any case, **please contact** the Director of Undergraduate Programs (DUP) of the German Department: **Marcel Schmid**, ms5qt@virginia.edu

Major in German Language, Literature, and Culture

(30 credits – 10 courses)

Required Courses:
-German (GERM) **3000** (Topic in Advanced German)
-German (GERM) **4600** (Fourth Year Seminar)

8 Elective Courses:
-a minimum of **6 courses in German** (GERM) at the 3000-level or above
-up to **2 GETR** (German in translation) /VITR courses at the 3000-level or above
-one **independent study** may be counted toward the major

Interdisciplinary German Studies Major

(30 credits – 10 courses)

Required Course:

-German (GERM) **3000** (Topic in Advanced German)

9 Elective Courses:

- 3 German (GERM) electives at the 3000-level or above
- 1 course at the **4000**-level or above: German (GERM) 4600 (Fourth Year Seminar), EURS 5000 (Europe in the World), or another relevant course or independent study at the 4000 level
- 5 additional courses with a connection to German studies offered by German, History, Philosophy, Sociology, and Religious Studies. Adjacent topics may also be admissible. Students should consult the DUP to determine if a course is suitable.

Please note: Up to **12 transfer credits** (study abroad or other US institutions) can be applied toward the **major** and **9** towards the **minor**.

German Studies Minor

(18 credits – 6 courses)

Six courses in German at the 3000-level or above, including GERM 3000 (Topic in Advanced German).
One GETR/VITR course and one independent study may be counted toward the minor.

For more information, please check out the German Department's homepage: https://german.as.virginia.edu