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**“Sustainability, the UN SDGs, Community Engagement, and German Studies”**

As an SLS SDG Fellow during the academic year 2019-2020, I worked closely with the GT Center for Serve-Learn-Sustain (SLS). The School of Modern Languages (ML) and the German program have partnered with SLS for several years. The Center supports faculty and students across campus with service-learning projects and courses about social, economic, and environmental sustainability. Over the past years, I have been teaching several classes affiliated with the Center, including my class “GRMN 3696: Current Issues - Sustainability in Germany,” in which I teach German approaches to sustainability and the UN SDGs during our [LBAT \(Language for Business and Technology\) study abroad program in Germany](#). In the study abroad program, we were also lucky to work with students who served as SLS Global Ambassadors during the past three years and who blogged and reported back to the campus community about the content of the class and different efforts of sustainable development in Germany.

## UN SDGs in German / Ziele für nachhaltige Entwicklung (2015-2030):



In the LBAT summer program, students take four upper-level German classes of 3 credits each (total of 12 credits at 3xxx/4xxx-level classes in German, they need one more class to get a German minor with 15 credits) to improve their language skills and their cultural knowledge. One student group interviewed Germans and tourists to inquire what they know about the 17 SDGs (in German). They have to create a short, 5-minute documentary video, which includes some interview excerpts.

Many U.S. high school and college students are very interested in finding out what European countries, particularly the German government as well as those living in Germany, are doing to reduce the use of fossil fuels and to counter the threat of climate change. Germany has tried to use renewable energies, run the extensive recycling program and the “deposit system for glass bottles/Pfandsystem”, reduce the use of plastic bags in grocery stores and the use of plastic straws and the single-use, disposable plastic silverware.

As part of the fellowship I also received support from David Eady, one of SLS's representatives from the Ray C. Anderson Center for Sustainable Business in the Scheller College of Business, to partner and interview Sustainability Officers from German companies in the U.S. and during our study abroad program in Germany. One group of students interviewed German representatives of the companies in the target language to ask questions about their sustainability plans and objectives.

In addition, I have also worked with faculty members in the School of Modern Languages to introduce the SDGs and the work of the UN Regional Center of Excellence (RCE) Atlanta to my colleagues in ML so they can decide if they want to include the SDGs into their curriculum. In 2018, various institutions in the Greater Atlanta area became an RCE and we are working with several institutions of higher education as well as several community partners to increase the support and visibility of clean energy and less waste production. I am also in touch with the UN RCE Hamburg in Germany and they have presented their work and projects to us during our visit there as well as at a conference organized by the Atlanta Global Studies Center. (Please add link: <https://atlantaglobalstudies.gatech.edu/atlanta-global-studies-symposium> )

Two of my colleagues and I presented our pedagogical approaches and teaching portfolio about aspects of social sustainability in the session *Sustainability Across Languages and Culture* at the Atlanta Global Studies Symposium in May 2019 about the movie *Neukölln: Unlimited* (2012, dir. Agostino Imondi) about a family from Lebanon that tried to find refuge and stay in Germany. The director visited the GT campus and the movie was shown and discussed as part of the Global Media Festival in 2018. (Please add link: <https://atlantaglobalstudies.gatech.edu/atlanta-global-studies-symposium/2019> )

In the class, we discuss different models of sustainability, their different foci and applicability, and we look at topics in contemporary German public debates and in the German-language news and deliberate how these issues connect to social, economic, and/or environmental sustainability. We trace in the class how the idea of sustainability first started when the cutting down of trees was stopped in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by forest reforms in Germany, how it spread across the European continent and then to other continents, accelerated by the Industrial Revolution. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the German explorer Alexander von Humboldt discovered through scientific tests that coal emissions have a negative effect on nature.

Besides the carbon footprint we also discuss the carbon handprint and how students can become active in helping to reduce carbon emissions which turns the passive and at times difficult situation of an individual faced with climate change into an active participant in the fight against climate change.





In fall 2019, I participated in a seminar at the German Studies Association Conference in Portland, OR, to better understand and further communicate how foreign language instructors across the U.S. can teach the UN SDGs in foreign language classrooms and how students can learn more about the implementation of those goals and the work towards those goals in their daily lives and in the workplace where they will start working after graduation from college. Several weeks later, I also presented our research at the Women in German Conference in October 2019 in Sewanee, TN, that I developed with my colleague Sabine von Mering from Brandeis University: "Climate Action, Eco-Criticism and the UN SDGs in Feminist German Studies." (Please post photo.)



Furthermore, I reached out to colleagues in German Studies from the Greater Atlanta area at Emory University, Kennesaw State University, Georgia State University, University of Georgia, Agnes Scott College, and Morehouse College through our networks of the AATG-GA (American Association for Teachers of German) and the Metro German Group. We exchanged ideas about best practices how we successfully include the SDGs in our foreign-language curriculum at different institutions. In the spring of 2019 and in spring 2020, I presented at the Metro German Group meeting the importance of the framework of the UN SDGs and the plan of the GT German Program to integrate the SDGs into our curriculum from GRMN 1001 to advanced, upper-level, and capstone classes as well as into our graduate curriculum for the Master's program of Global Media and Cultures.

German Studies professors and foreign language instructors in the K-16 systems across the U.S. have become facilitators for education for sustainable development and climate

activism as they incorporate the SDGs in their classes. All faculty members in German Studies can help advance our students' knowledge about sustainable ways of living that is necessary for the protection of the planet and the survival of our species. U.S. students are very interested in finding out what European countries, Germany in particular, are doing to reduce the use of fossil fuels and to counter the threat of climate change. We would like to encourage our students to act on that knowledge because it is necessary for "human health and planetary health," as Paul Hawken describes it in *Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming* (2016).

In our study-abroad program, students work with a number of non-profits and organizations such as the Transition Town initiative, the "Syndikate" initiative, and the local government chapters in Germany that work on the UN SDGs for the community and cities. These initiatives and organizations have delivered lectures and given us tours to explain how they try to lead sustainable lives in Hamburg, Husum, and Weimar and students engage with them in conversations, discussions, and in videos that our students have to create as a class assignment. This way, students experience a sense of "global ecological citizenship," (268) to borrow Hubert Zapf's term from his study *Literature as Cultural Ecology: Sustainable Texts* (2016), in German Studies, Foreign Language studies, Global Studies, and beyond.