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ASYNCHRONOUS NEGOTIATIONS: INTRODUCING ELECTRONIC PORTFOLIOS TO PROMOTE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN FOREIGN- LANGUAGE BUSINESS CLASSROOMS

One of the conundrums facing the foreign-language (FL) teacher at any level is how to connect course content with real-world situations and skills.¹ As the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (National Standards, 1999)² imply, syllabus planning must commence with an assessment of student audience and institutional mission. Particularly at the postsecondary level, FL instructors need to construct their courses using available technological and situational opportunities in conjunction with materials that will complement students' needs. This article examines how an intermediate course in FL business can augment its current materials with an electronic portfolio to better address students' interests and career objectives. Although focused on the goals of a Business German course, this article serves as a case study on the use of electronic tools, such as Blackboard™ and WebCT™ to extend the precepts articulated in the *Standards*.

The second-year Business German course discussed is part of a three-year track sequence, beginning with first-semester German, at The University of Texas at Austin (UT). To commence assessing the needs of our students in this course, I first conducted a needs analysis survey to identi-

¹The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* are part of an overall standards project for U.S. education, attempting to set up a comprehensive framework for the academic, business, personal, recreational and practical benefits of studying foreign languages.

²The electronic portfolio outlined in this article uses Blackboard™ (www.blackboard.com). This Internet-based learning tool, and others like it (e.g., WebCT™, www.webct.com) allows instructors and students to share digital content, organize that content in folders, and participate in dialog about the content. Discussions are "threaded," which means that participants communicate with each other but not at the same time (i.e., discussions are asynchronous). Messages posted by participants appear on a single page in the order they are posted.

fy their interests and backgrounds. This inventory revealed several trends that influenced subsequent course planning. First, only a small portion of the Business German total enrollment (less than 15%) was affiliated with our institution's international business program. Thirty-nine of the forty-five students surveyed came from other colleges: Liberal Arts (56%), Engineering (17%), Natural Sciences (8%), and Communication (5%).³

Most compelling was the degree to which the desire for work experience abroad influenced the decision to enroll in our Business German program. Seventy percent of the students surveyed stated they wanted to enroll in Business German courses because they were interested in obtaining some type of international work experience. In fact, over fifty percent of these students planned to complete or had already completed a three to six month internship offered by UT in a German-speaking country.

Even if students did not major in business or international business, most of them could still be profiled as future business professionals. In other words, the majority of respondents wished to offer a future employer an academic background in their field of study, complemented with unique cross-cultural experiences in the business world. Open to a range of employment possibilities in the future, students aspired to jobs that preferably, although not exclusively, involved international travel opportunities and the potential for joining the ranks of management.

Along with questionnaire results, I looked at feedback from graduates of our program. Of the forty-one students who graduated from the Business German track between spring 1999 and spring 2001, sixteen had indicated that they had obtained entry-level positions with the following international corporations: AMD, CNET Networks, Dell Computer Corporation, Intel, Motorola, National Instruments, Sebra, Sega of America Dreamcast, Sprint, and United Bank. None of the positions that these students received specifically sought job candidates with German language and culture skills; however, all sixteen of these students indicated an interest in, and a desire for, eventually occupying a position that involved working with clients in a German-speaking country.

³This result was expected as the requirements for business majors at UT leave little room for students to take courses in other colleges/departments. Due to rounding, these figures add up to 101%.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE SKILLS AND THE NEEDS OF THE GLOBAL MARKETPLACE

With these student profiles in mind, I reviewed a series of analyses and studies that focused on foreign-language-related skills as they pertain to the needs of international management. From the examination of literature on international management strategies and job descriptions available at UT's placement center, I uncovered a "good news, bad news" scenario.⁴ First, the good news: although knowledge relating to a company's business domain is a significant factor in the hiring process of entry-level candidates, generic or general cognitive skills (e.g., cross-cultural competence, critical thinking, and problem solving) apparently outweigh specialized knowledge in accounting for successful entry-level job placement (Bikson et al., 1994; Egbert et al., 1998; Lenn et al., 2000). Our main audience, students not in the College of Business, would be competitive in the global marketplace if they could demonstrate ability to use higher-order synthetic or analytic thinking with relevant German language materials.

Specifically, what these reports characterized as generic or cross-transferable skills were typically viewed in terms of an individual's learning-to-learn and were frequently mentioned as a critical component of competitive performance for entry-level employees. Particularly valued seem to be those generic skills that relate to affective processes, such as cognitive and behavioral flexibility. As Black et al. (1999) see this synthesis, when managers in the global marketplace can balance tensions and embrace duality, "they act far more effectively in the international business world" (p. 79). A business course that could promote such capabilities would, theoretically, fill an important niche.

The bad news was that the link between command of a foreign language and command of these generic skills was not evident to the business world. Across the board, business leaders and human resource experts reported skepticism about whether generic or cross-transferable skills were fostered through foreign-language study (Bikson et al., 1994; Vande Berg, 1997; Moxon et al., 1998; Lenn et al., 2000). As a case in

⁴These conclusions are based on a review of a) current literature on international management strategies as expressed by business leaders and human resource experts (e.g., Bikson et al. 1994; Moxon et al. 1998; Black et al. 1999; KPMG International 1999; Marx 1999; Lenn et al. 2000), b) approximately 250 current job descriptions available at UT career placement centers, and c) current applied-linguistic literature as it relates to business language (e.g., Fryer 1996; Vande Berg 1997; Grosse 1998; Egbert et al. 1998; Evans 1999).

point, the research of Moxon et al. concluded that, when recruiting for international positions, US-based international businesses valued intercultural competence and experience living abroad considerably ahead of foreign-language competency *per se*. Compared with such intercultural experience, language fluency, in and of itself, emerged as one of the weakest predictors of effectiveness in the global marketplace for employers and their expert staff (Bikson et al., 1994; Grandin et al., 1997; Marx, 1999).

Evidently, to serve students' needs, FL programs as a whole should address both the "good and the bad" news. One way to do this would be to articulate curricula with the two foreign-language learning standards whose goals reflect those expressed by the business analysts: the Comparisons standard and the Connections standard (see Appendix A). To develop the highly-valued generic, cross-transferable cognitive skills (goals implied by the Comparisons standard), business students would need projects that helped them analyze successful and unsuccessful business transactions within a particular environment. To simulate intercultural experience in embracing tensions and duality (goals implied by the Connections standard) students would need activities to practice both informal discussion and formal presentation, and to interact with a simulated business audience interested in ideas and topics framed in an unfamiliar cultural setting. Work using both standards would need to be documented in ways that could demonstrate to prospective employers that these students possessed not only language fluency but also a cross-cultural awareness of using that fluency to pragmatic advantage.

ADAPTING THE TEXTBOOK

A number of excellent textbooks available for Business German can lay the foundations for the project outlined in this article. However, since these books serve different audiences in different institutional settings, they all share a threshold limitation that instructors typically address by supplementing their content. Current textbooks are able to provide information about various aspects of the business world as characteristics of German industry, the European Market, the role of service industries such as banking and marketing, the strategies of management for various types of firms, and how labor unions and government controls affect industrial concerns. However, they are inherently unable to offer practice in crea-

tive applications of this information tailored to the needs of particular institutions.

To illustrate, textbooks offer readings and assign tasks for assessing comprehension of these passages, many of which are authentic; that is, they are original publications in business magazines and popular journals such as *Der Spiegel* or *Wirtschaftswoche*. Accompanying exercises focus on accurate comprehension of information and acquisition of new vocabulary through matching clauses of partial sentences or revising content to align with textual semantics (e.g. Pausell et al., 1999). Other books ask students to translate, to fill in blanks, to identify and reconstruct grammatical features of the text, or use discrete-point questions referring to textual information to assist them in writing a short essay (Eismann, 2000; Kelz, 2000).

The German language expression suggested by oral assignments in these books, nevertheless, limits cognitive and linguistic demands on students to the new language and information appropriate for their learning level. With respect to the employer, needs identified for our students, such as the sound pedagogy of incremental learning and restrictions on new information reflected in these textbook strategies, can only represent a first step in achieving the Comparisons and Connections goals. Grammar and information acquisition are our bottom line, but not our students' ultimate objective. Textbook readings and their exercises can serve as foundations, but need to be supplemented by tasks that develop essential generic skills future employers seem to demand: independent thinking, problem solving, and cross-cultural sensibilities.

In developing such tasks, I looked at national and institutional precedents as well as current university-wide initiatives. On the national level, recent models for student portfolios offered a promising place to start. Ideal as a resource to cite on a résumé or use in interviews, portfolios have been the subject of major conferences and extensive research across disciplines in higher education for over a decade.⁵ Portfolio projects can

⁵A series of one-day workshops, titled *Tomorrow's High Performance Worker: Building the Pipeline Today*, took place in five U.S. cities--Atlanta, Boston, Dearborn, Los Angeles, and Phoenix--and was sponsored by the Mott Foundation and the National Alliance of Business. Administrators, faculty, students from local colleges and universities, business leaders, recently hired employees, and community leaders came together for each workshop to discuss strategies to improve interactions between the different constituencies and identify ways of working together to better prepare graduates for the world of work. In the general findings and recommendations from the five workshops, the Business-Higher Education Forum (a partnership of the American Council on Education and the National Al-

also provide documented evidence of individual ability to investigate problems and communicate alternative scenarios to address those problems (Wright, 2000).

In addition to evidence of individual ability to problem solve, a review of the literature dealing with learning to learn pointed to an additional component I wanted to incorporate into our program—the experience of working in a team. While small group work is often a feature of individual assignments, the research of Abrams (2002), Doughty et al. (1985), Kintsch et al. (1978), Pica et al. (1996), and Rudduck (1991) suggests ways to incorporate teamwork into a more extensive, semester-length task. Two characteristics emerged as contributing to the learning curve of participants in small group activities: 1) problem solving, in conjunction with 2) structuring of and accounting for task execution. When students had to solve a problem together and account for stages in reaching their solution, their learning curve was significantly higher.

After deciding to construct a portfolio project that would structure incremental goals for each stage in a problem-solving process, I was confronted with simple questions of feasibility, such as having students access each others' work with a minimum of managerial difficulty. Traditionally, team efforts outside of class necessitate arranging times to meet together, telephone conferencing, or placing materials on reserve in the library, which is often difficult for three or four students who work or have many extra-curricular activities. A related problem emerged: how would the instructor monitor progress speedily and efficiently for all concerned?

Answers to these questions were found in UT's recent emphasis on computer applications in the classroom. For example, UT has chosen two software packages (Blackboard™ and WebCT™) to help faculty offer course materials on the World Wide Web. This technology enables instructors and students to “share learning materials, communicate and collaborate, and evaluate and measure student progress” (Dillard, 2002). Recourse to this, or similar, software promises to address concerns about managing with optimum efficacy a textbook-independent project that is generated by students. Blackboard™ can serve as a portal for sharing

liance of Business) indicated that portfolio assessment helps improve college-to-workforce articulation. This summary is available on the Internet at: www.acenet.edu/About/programs/Programs&Analysis/BHEF/initiatives/tomorrow/regional.html.

portfolio drafts. At the same time, that portal can be the site for subsequent portfolio stages in feedback by teammates and the instructor on any individual's project in progress.

Based on the identified goals of combining cultural analysis with teamwork to foster communication of that analysis, I made an electronic portfolio the centerpiece project of our Business German program. Portfolio topics are loosely generated from the readings and topic emphases in the textbook of a particular course (e.g., Pausel et al., 1999), thus requiring students to use that textbook's language and informational foundation to undertake independent research into additional treatments of the topic and an analysis of the findings. I decided to use a computerized version of a portfolio format (Wright, 2000) for the research project.

THE PORTFOLIO

The following grading guidelines were set out to build a portfolio-driven set of course goals into a more traditional textbook and grammar-outcome driven course. The grading scale identifies how we sought to reweight our curriculum and to reward the kinds of skills that business experts and prospective employers report as their hiring priorities.

GENERAL COURSE CURRICULUM (60%):

Exams (3)	300 pts
Homework (15)	150 pts
Quizzes (10)	100 pts
Chapter summary presentation (PowerPoint™)	50 pts

PORTFOLIO AND PRESENTATION (40%):

Outline (2 pages)	50 pts
Draft (3 pages)	100 pts
Draft rewrite (4 pages)	100 pts
Portfolio summary presentation (PowerPoint™)	60 pts
Peer review (outline)	30 pts
Peer review (draft)	30 pts
Peer review (final draft)	30 pts
Total	1000 pts

The first five components of the syllabus (exams, homework, quizzes, essays, and chapter summary presentation) make up 60% of the course

and represent traditional textbook-driven business German tasks at UT. The remaining five components (40% of the syllabus) are student-directed and represent a move toward the higher-order communicative skills identified as necessary by the business environment.

The portfolio project is integrated with Blackboard™, an Internet-based program that allows students to share drafts of their project and exchange comments about documents (or any other topic) via threaded discussions. To structure student and instructor time management, the electronic portfolio is built around three five-week periods within a fifteen week semester. Each period has a specific problem-solving function that also builds in feedback about language acquisition use from the instructor and team members appointed to work with the primary investigator. Students are provided with a Semester Overview so that they can plan and budget their time accordingly. The overview is reproduced below (see TABLE 1):

TABLE 1
Semester Overview - reads from left to right

	Process	Outcome	Process		Outcome
	Individual	Individual	Team	Individual	Individual
Outline Weeks 1-5	Establish initial Webliography (5 sources), create outline	Publish outline and URLs from Webliography to Blackboard™	Team of 3 and instructor critique outline and sources	Rewrite outline	Publish rewrite to Blackboard™
Draft Weeks 6-10	Transform outline into 3 page draft narrative	Publish draft narrative to Blackboard™	New team of 3 and instructor critique draft and sources	Rewrite draft (final draft, 4 pages)	Publish rewrite to Blackboard™
Final Draft, Presentation Weeks 11-15	Transform final draft into 6-7 slide PowerPoint™ presentation	Publish PowerPoint™ presentation to class web server	New team of 3 and instructor critique final draft and presentation	Finalize presentation	Class presentation

As an overview category, “Team” indicates that a new group of students is assigned to review and critique each others’ drafts for that five-week

phase of the portfolio process. Similar to small group work conducted in class, the portfolio team promotes collaborative learning by encouraging students to share in a systematic feedback monitored by the instructor, who also participates in the process. Since teams are rotated at five-week intervals, students are exposed to, and can compare, more than one style of project execution. Moreover, with their portfolio responsibilities broken into five-week segments, the class as a whole puts into practice a viable model for teamwork and time management in the professional world. The role of the instructor during the semester is similar to that of the students. He or she is responsible for providing a written critique on each outcome of every portfolio. In addition, the instructor is responsible for opening the Blackboard™ account, creating main folders for all portfolio phases (e.g., Outline, Draft, PowerPoint™), and generating the various teams within each portfolio assignment.⁶

To avoid cognitive or linguistic overload for students working with unfamiliar target-language texts, however, one formidable task remained. This was to identify discrete strategies for intermediate FL learners to apply to text analysis and task management at every point in their independent and team-generated efforts at portfolio development. In effect, I had to devise study guides for students that would act as pedagogical safety nets. In other words, the study guides would have to ensure that students knew what different kinds of German-language texts to look for, and how to look for them, on the Internet. Once texts were selected, the study guides would also have to function as tools with which these unfamiliar, unannotated passages on familiar topics would be comprehensible to students without more than their occasional recourse to the instructor, dictionaries, or translation.

THE PEDAGOGY OF PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

To ensure that the portfolio assignment involves problem solving, students begin by choosing five Web-based texts (in German) that shed different light on their topic. Each electronic source, or “e-genre,” represents a particular position or argument vis-à-vis the student’s chosen topic. Together, the five sources illuminate diverse views on the topic and constitute the research basis for each individual’s portfolio. To guide

⁶In Blackboard™, instructors create forums within the tool *Discussion Board*, which is located under main icon *Communication*. In WebCT™, instructors create forums within the tool *Bulletin Board*.

students in identifying how their sources differ in discourse and substance, they focus their analysis on assessment categories such as text style, authorial intent, and content.

Using the suggestions from Chapter 6 of Swaffar, Arens and Byrnes (1991), I broke the process of developing the Webliography (weeks 1-5) into a series of two problem-solving activities. For each stage of these two activities, students need only choose from a finite number of commonly-used terms which characterize the German-language texts they have selected. Consequently, instead of having to synthesize the information in a source, learners initially read selections with the objective of sorting that text's unfamiliar language and information into a relatively small number of very familiar semantic categories such as language (formal, informal, active, passive, personal, impersonal) or the e-genre source (newspaper, book, government report, etc.).

The first activity is called *Task Matrix for Critiquing Style, Author Intent, and Content* (see TABLE 2) since it asks students to make decisions based on such categories as "the title and first paragraph of a passage" or "intended audience." After selecting from among the options available, students are asked to provide several phrases or clauses from the text to indicate the reason for their choice. For example, the first category (title) has four choices: idea, problem, event, institution/business. The German language title, "Enron Scandal May Be Worldwide Fiasco," followed by a paragraph discussing the specifics of an insider trading incident involving Germany's major banks and insurance companies, would probably lead a student to select the "event" or "problem" category, citing language such as "investigators are examining" and "a larger systemic problem. . . ."

Evolving from their topic, students examine their five sources using the categorical rubrics in TABLE 2. The complete inventory of strategic decisions to be made is illustrated below.

TABLE 2
Task Matrix for Critiquing Style, Author Intent, and Content

<p>Task 1-Analyze</p> <p>Position each source against the following eight categories:</p>	<p>1. title idea problem event institution/business</p> <p>2. purpose inform instruct entertain persuade criticize analyze market</p>	<p>3. e-genre newspaper book gov. report advertisement infomercial pers. webpage documentary film interview editorial</p> <p>4. type of narrative event conversation monologue research</p>	<p>5. language formal informal passive active narrative</p> <p>6. intended audience international national local individual customer</p>	<p>7. position conservative liberal biased text presents multiple perspectives</p> <p>8. utility to each argument supports refutes</p>
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Once the decisions are made, the students post their assessment to their team's folder. The instructor and three designated classmates read the entries and respond with feedback in German about the accuracy and adequacy of this initial stage in collecting arguments with which to illustrate and analyze a business topic.

In addition to analyzing a selection's style, intent, and substance (TABLE 2), each student makes a second, separate assessment of the significance and credibility of the articles (see TABLE 3). A distinction between significance and credibility is necessary to prevent, for example, a text deemed lacking in credibility from being dismissed as insignificant. In other words, a newspaper article or editorial might reflect common assumptions or stereotypes such as "Chrysler will dominate because American firms are more powerful than companies run by people in foreign countries," although financial, contractual, or other factors mentioned in the passage or other selections might render that assumption dubious.

Asking students to assess significance and credibility helps guide student decisions about choosing sources to analyze in their initial and final drafts of the portfolios. In this sense, the *Task Matrix for Critiquing Significance and Credibility of Sources* (TABLE 3) has a gatekeeper function. It weeds out trivial or uninteresting sources. Any source ranked in

the bottom half of the grid in both categories would immediately be disqualified from serious consideration. The categories, their definition, and directions for using this matrix are illustrated in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3
Task Matrix for Critiquing Significance and Credibility of Sources

<p>Task: Rate each source</p> <p>1. Based on your analysis in <i>Task 1</i> [Table 2 above], rate each source in relation to its significance and credibility (i.e., do the analyses from task one render the source credible?). If it falls below the center line, reject it. Keep in mind that even if a source is not credible, it may represent a common stereotype or opinion that is worth addressing in your draft.</p> <p>3. Explain in 3-4 sentences your reasoning for keeping/rejecting each source.</p> <p>2. Narrow your sources to include the 3 most significant sources (i.e., one for each main argument listed in the outline).</p>	<p>significant, credible keep</p>	<p>significant, not credible keep</p>
	<p>insignificant, credible reject</p>	<p>insignificant, not credible reject</p>

Since all students use the same matrices to evaluate their texts, they have a common basis for discussing their views.⁷ Along with their Semester Overview (TABLE 1), which structures a time-line for activities and outcomes, and the two *Matrices*, which structure analyses of their sources, students also get specific instructions about how each task in the Semester Overview is broken down into subtasks (see Appendix B).

Recalling the tripartite division of the Semester Overview, students brainstorm their topic and their outline in the first week of class. Given the wide range of students interests that was established in our needs' assessment survey, it was agreed that students should choose their own topics even at the beginning of the semester and that it would be essential they do so in terms of those interests. The more closely they can relate their topics to their career goals, the more meaningful the projects become for the students. Thus, as a result of the brainstorming activities during the first week of class, students identify their portfolio focus,

⁷The task matrices are provided to students in German. They are available upon request.

ideally a topic related to their personal (career) goals for taking Business German.

Predictably, students who have difficulty finding a portfolio topic do not do well on this project, and instructor assistance at this stage is particularly important (Long et al., 1992). Consequently, students are asked to hold a one-on-one conference with the instructor about their topic selection to insure its personal and cultural appropriateness. Based in part on that session with the instructor, students then develop a tentative outline in German for their chosen topic, describing why they selected each source. At the end of the third week, students post their tentative outlines to Blackboard™ along with the five sources and their rationale for using those sources to document their topic. In weeks four and five the class as a whole, divided into teams of three, reads the outline postings from assigned authors and offers feedback on each other's work.

In weeks six through ten, based in part on initial feedback from the instructor and fellow students, the portfolio author creates a draft, narrows the focus of the topic, limits the sources and main arguments to three, and reworks the outline into a three to four page narrative. Students receive a four-point plan for rewriting their outlines and reassessing their sources:

- Briefly summarize each source (choose three from original five submitted during the first five-week interval). For each of the three, focus the summary on the one or two main arguments that are important for the topic.
- Rewrite the original outline (e.g. topic description and argument summaries) based on instructor and peer comments and the final three sources chosen.
- Reflect in two to three paragraphs about how the topic and main arguments changed or did not change since posting the first version online.
- Post rewritten outline to the new team in the forum titled "Draft."

To enable feedback from their team, authors must post their narrative drafts on Blackboard™ by the seventh week. Team respondents are told to provide feedback about the three source documents the portfolio author will use to develop his or her presentation. As with their own selection processes, the team critics will apply the *Task Matrices* (Tables 2 and 3 above) to assess the logic, cohesion, depth, quality of sources, as well as grammar and language. As a team effort, this stage in critiquing sources moves students beyond descriptive language toward analytical language in a communicative modality—the threaded discussion of a bulletin board format.

During weeks 11-15, students rewrite their drafts to include peer and instructor feedback. In the final phase of the project, students synthesize the entire project into a ten-minute presentation with PowerPoint™, presenting orally and formally what had been, to this point, informal collaboration. This is the final step in polishing their problem-solving and cross-cultural communicative skills.

THE ADVANTAGES OF PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT

Portfolio-based assessment as outlined here proposes no more than augmenting existing goals and materials with tasks designed to promote the special needs and interests of a particular class, given the opportunities available in its particular institutional setting. While these suggestions are made in the context of an intermediate-level business course, their operating premises apply to any course design, positing that foreign-language courses will benefit from a needs' assessment survey of students themselves and literature in the field as the basis for tailoring tasks to learning goals appropriate for students in a specific learning environment.

The needs assessment suggested the need to adopt the Comparisons and Connections standards to use internet technology in ways that fit with the opportunities available at the University of Texas. Students learning Business German could practice skills of research, decision making, and presentation. To integrate problem-solving in the abstract with the concrete problem of executing a large, semester-scale project, students have to practice careful time management and participate in collaborative work. Student participation in peer reviews necessitates engaging in negotiation, presenting alternative ideas, and presenting dissenting as well as concurring opinions, which are skills essential for effectiveness in the business world (Black et al., 1999). Student searches for internet docu-

ments to support or illuminate their arguments from different vantage points encourages them to consider cross-cultural messages in those documents.

By supplementing the information-acquisition work of a textbook, a course can serve the goals of language learning and content learning. The electronic portfolio design illustrated here can supplement existing course materials by adding a focus to areas of interest that students typically have in real-world, cross-cultural contexts. That is, this design works backward from the identified targeted competencies for professional and intercultural frameworks, rather than forward from a textbook's organization. When a textbook drives the curriculum, courses are commonly organized around the content of a specific number of topics presented in chapters. In contrast, the electronic portfolio is organized around students' learning, as evidenced by what they actually produce. The role of the instructor thus changes from textbook expert to facilitator of effective performance of specific skills.

As a way of supplementing the traditional textbook materials, the activities outlined in this article offer students another way to learn business German language and culture in the context of their personal career goals, as well as a sense of responsibility toward the field. In this way, using a portfolio project as part of a course syllabus places the study of language and culture in the broader context of interdisciplinary studies. Whether students are studying architecture, biology, business or education, the portfolio project allows them to connect language-learning with their field of study and their personal career goals. Focusing this project on the Comparisons and Connections standards also emphasizes how the content of one discipline (in this case, Business German) intersects with real-world skills (cross-cultural competence, critical thinking, research, problem solving, and communication), and a student's chosen field of study.

By shifting the curricula to reflect the needs of communication in business, business-language courses can be adapted to promote student achievement in various intellectual, social, and cultural contexts. In this way, portfolio assessment helps make language-learning more relevant to students by presenting it as a learning-to-learn process with higher-order cognitive and social goals.

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APPENDIX A.

Standards for Foreign Language Learning

COMMUNICATION

Communicate in Languages Other than English

Standard 1.1: Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions.

Standard 1.2: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics.

Standard 1.3: Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.

CULTURES

Gain Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures

Standard 2.1: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.

Standard 2.2: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.

CONNECTIONS

Connect with Other Disciplines and Acquire Information

Standard 3.1: Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language.

Standard 3.2: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures.

COMPARISONS

Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture

Standard 4.1: Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.

Standard 4.2: Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.

COMMUNITIES

Participate in Multilingual Communities at Home and Around the World

Standard 5.1: Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting.

Standard 5.2: Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

Source: *National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project: Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century*, p. 9.

APPENDIX B.
Task Overview

Outline (weeks 1-5)

- Topic summary (4-5 sentences)
- List 3 main arguments (3-4 sentences describing each argument)
- Create webliography and complete two task matrix activities for critiquing sources [Tables 2 and 3]
- Post to team's Outline folder on Blackboard™
- Instructor and peer reviews focus on two task matrices for critiquing sources
- Rewrite and post

Draft (weeks 6-10)

- 3-4 page narrative with intro, body, and conclusion
- Detailed description of 3 main arguments in body
- Updated webliography (2-3 sources per argument)
- Post to team's Draft folder on Blackboard™
- Instructor and peer reviews focus on logic, cohesion, depth, quality of sources, as well as grammar and language
- Rewrite and post

PowerPoint (weeks 11-15)

- Summary of project with intro, body, conclusion (max 7 slides)
- Body focuses on personal interpretation of portfolio project
- Convert to html
- Post to team's presentation folder on Blackboard™, peer review
- Oral class presentation