

Summary of Arguments Regarding Elimination of German

(I am adding paragraphs at the end on the money arguments after the Senate meeting of 15 April 2008)

These notes were originally drafted for the Provost's Council Subcommittee to review the Proposal to Discontinue the German Program. As of this writing, that subcommittee has recommended to the Provost's Council that German be discontinued, and the Provost's Council will shortly be discussing and voting its recommendation. I wrote these notes with complex but not hidden agendas. Under the Parent Effectiveness Training model, I wanted those arguing for eliminating German to know that I had heard their arguments and understood them well enough that I could paraphrase them. Under the Dwight D. Eisenhower get-every-briefing-paper-onto-two-sides-of-one-sheet model, I wanted to set the main relevant arguments out so that decision-makers could have reminders after wading through the thick binder we were given. Also, I was prompted to do this because it seemed to me that the discussion is no longer based on following arguments. I'm now unclear about the basis for the discussion. I now think of these comments as directed at a wider and somewhat indefinite audience, including the Provost's Council, Provost, the Academic Senate, and the President. Please be clear that I am not speaking for anyone else in this document. In particular, the Provost's Council Subcommittee has voiced strong disagreement, particularly with my giving weight to many arguments below, and, again, has voted 2-1 to recommend elimination of German. And now the full Provost's Council has voted 10-4, one abstaining, to recommend elimination.

Please feel free to forward this to anyone else on any grounds. If I have misrepresented arguments I would like to hear about it.

There is a great deal of background to this decision, and though the record is perhaps public, it is not easy to access. The Subcommittee's near-300 page binder on reserve in the library contains relevant policies, the original recommendation to discontinue German, some of the procedural debates, and a great deal of correspondence from people who support keeping German, with a variety of arguments offered in that support (and many letters with no arguments at all). Whether the binder is a complete record is unclear—it may not be complete—but then it is also not clear that a complete record is required for us to do our job—it may be that a reasonable attempt to cover the issues is adequate.

The first general problem we faced in the Subcommittee is that while we have a wide variety of kinds of arguments in the binder, there is no set of criteria to use to sort relevant arguments from irrelevant or crucial from those of lighter weight. Some of this weighing of opposing arguments is difficult. Sometimes it seems administrators can only see the monetary arguments, which they take as paramount. Many letters in the binder, on the other hand, are blind to those arguments though their relevance has to be granted.

One main argument is alarmingly incomplete. There seems to be a tendency to think that the rationale which was offered for moving to targeted cuts rather than across-the-board cuts, namely that in order to preserve the greater good we have to sacrifice in circumscribed areas—there is a tendency on the part of some to think that having that rationale in place justifies the elimination of German. But that thinking is offered without detailing and weighing out the sacrifices or the savings to the general good, even though analyses are offered in the binder which support the claims that the alleged budgetary savings are illusory, the consequences for the broader community have not been thought through and are broader than have been acknowledged, and that long term losses have not been included in weighing costs and benefits. Similar problems run throughout the binder, and the existence of those problems is offered by some as support for the claim that any such elimination should be based on a larger, more consultative process such as the program reprioritization effort now taking shape.

The original proposal (though we now work with a 3/11/08 version in the binder) to discontinue German offered several reasons for choosing German as an appropriate program for discontinuation. That

proposal, after reviewing such things as the need to take care of present students in the major, stated clearly that the main reasons for the proposal are budgetary, and further that the German program was about the right size in budget for its elimination to meet the needed dollar value of cuts. The proposal points out that issues have been raised for years about the viability of the program by several reviewers because of the low number of majors and low enrollments in some of the upper-division courses. The proposal acknowledges that recently proposed changes in the major are devised to partially address those numbers.

The binder is deeply and conspicuously divided between, on the one hand, a very few, mainly administrator-written, endorsements of discontinuation, and, on the other, an outpouring of support by students, faculty, staff, and alumni. The arguments in the binder can easily be sorted into themes. In the rest of these comments I'll list those which seem most relevant to me.

i. Several analyses (LaBahn, UCC, Stoob, plus misc. other mentions) claim the alleged budgetary savings are illusory or are exaggerated enough that budgetary savings, including long-term savings, do not justify discontinuing the program. These analyses stress the need to include university wide costs, opportunity costs, and losses of students, including primary and secondary majors, who are served by the program. These analyses are in response to Dean Snyder's original proposal, which has its basis in enrollment numbers from the Resource Review and statistics from Analytic Studies reports. Interim Dean Ayooob's recommendation, where one would expect the countering arguments to have been answered, seems to take for granted, in the face of this disagreement, that those who claim the savings are illusory need not be taken seriously, with the result that the claims have not been answered in the binder at all. In the subcommittee's discussions, both administrators are adamant that there must surely be savings in the long term—that discontinuing offering sections will allow the money which had gone into offering those sections to be reallocated into areas with stronger enrollments. Those arguments, though, should be in the binder in some specific form, rather than just affirming the original proposal's now contested figures. There are several problems regarding these arguments. One is where they come to bear. Discontinuing Biology or Art or Psychology would result in huge savings from all the sections we need not offer, but the resulting losses in student enrollment would probably be disastrous to our budget. The italicized comments below return to these issues.

ii. There is a great deal of material in the file to support the claim that the program produces benefits to the university from various kinds of networking—local language programs, alumni, exchanges with and visits to Europe, and the irreplaceable educational experiences which accompany those. All these factors should be regarded as relevant to cost-benefits analysis, perhaps more relevant as long-term losses if the program is discontinued.

iii. Deliberations within the subcommittee have tended to center on only a small selection of the arguments on this list. Some are as follows. There is a need now for budget cuts which are not across-the-board but instead are targeted cuts. The sooner these cuts can be made the sooner reallocation can be made. The decision to make targeted cuts is basically a decision to keep harms, losses, damage, restricted to a small area of the university rather than to make cuts which harm a great many people. More across-the-board cuts are now likely to impair the quality of our educational mission fairly broadly (e.g. G.E. classes will be less able to develop writing skills and analytic skills because of increased class sizes). *My response: it is very important for these arguments that the originally-conceived savings be real rather than illusory, and even if they are real, it is a mistake to suppose that stopping the bleeding will result in stocking the blood bank—there are*

not going to be funds for reallocation, only less of a deficit. The weighing of harms, large harms or sacrifice for a small group in service for the greater good of avoiding harms to a large group, ought to be more explicit rather than what it is presently, namely arm-waving.

The subcommittee also emphasized some other points. The considerations which resulted in the German discontinuation proposal were made out in the open and the basis for them was not kept from anyone. The process has been consultative and aboveboard even when taking feedback made the process difficult. We cannot afford to maintain programs which have a high proportion of very small classes. The ability of the program to maintain the appearance of sustainability has been based on problematic moves within WLC. The Spanish program has probably been reduced by measures such as foregoing GE offerings so that German can offer more sections of GE and help its numbers. Several of the recently-declared second majors may have resulted from students attempting to help the program in the face of the proposal to discontinue it, though their intention actually to do the major is doubtful. There is an issue about the extent to which enrollments and student-faculty-ratios have been inflated by voluntary overloads. The number of sections near the level at which we normally cancel for low enrollment is high.

iv. There's a problem about the name of the University should the program be discontinued. (I thought I had made this argument up myself, but there are letters in the binder antedating my first mention.) This argument needs to be made carefully—it is not a hard-headed or objective argument, nor does it rest on any public survey data, though surely such could be had. Part of the argument is about manners or an invitation to parody. Perhaps one way to give the argument is to say that there is a *faux pas* involved when a university is named for a German polymath whose name is associated with German research worldwide but that university does not offer German—it looks like some kind of sly consumer fraud, a bait-and-switch.

v. The program contributes to the public understanding of HSU's quality and to the identity of its alumni, which understanding is now an important part of our role in the area and among our graduates. This public understanding and identity is an admittedly vague part of our obligations to those we serve.

vi. The program deserves to be better supported, on the basis of its quality and its achievements, and if it were better supported it would be sustainable by any standards. In some places this argument is put in terms of the issues now (and for the last half-dozen years) being a result of decisions not to replace Professor Shaffer, a decision which was made without considering its ramifications—or a decision which was perhaps only an attempt to duck making a decision because it would have been difficult then either to make the budgetary commitment to the program or to face the need to discontinue it. If resources were allocated to the program enough to include recruitment and more active support for exchanges, then the enrollment numbers and efficiencies in the program would take it off the radar for consideration as a program whose sustainability is of concern.

vii. The resources of the program together with its relations to a wide variety of stakeholders represent an enormous resource, and program discontinuation would be squandering an inheritance of emotional and intellectual capital.

viii. The program is shaped by and confirms the post-Takaki vision of diversity for the campus, and is consistent with the current rationale for the DCG requirements. That rationale is a result of our formidable and successful work to make DCG requirements much more substantive than they had been before we called Takaki in.

ix. The program is one place on campus where the central ideals of the HSU vision are instantiated.

x. Whether the budgetary savings are real or illusory, it is now clear that they will not be forthcoming as quickly as had been foreseen in the original proposal. This fact makes the need for using this process rather than waiting for the Program Reprioritization Task Force process less urgent. Program Reprioritization has from the beginning been designed to ensure that any discontinuation decisions are as broadly based as possible. This process, in contrast, has been shackled by its beginning with deliberations within a college which did not involve, and still have not involved, comparisons with other programs in other colleges. This decision should be put off for one based on a better process, especially since the better process is well on its way to taking shape.

xi. The decision to engage in targeted cuts rather than require everyone to take incremental cuts may have been a mistake. The rhetorical question, if we do not cut here, where then shall we cut? makes this issue more clear. The question assumes our thinking has been shifted to supposing that if we do not cut German then we have to cut another program—but this takes several possibilities off the table and some of those may still be viable. For instance, it may be some departments in CAHSS would be willing to give up a course section in order that German be continued. At the very least the question could be asked in this form rather than in the undefined way it was put to the chairs. This is like a thought experiment in which before an accident we consider which would be preferable—have one of the six of us die, or everyone break a leg. Thinking of the college or the university as a team makes targeted cuts (even when we are admittedly near the transition zone where cuts affect our ability to perform core missions) less attractive. Instead of thinking of the college or the university as a team, we are moving toward thinking of programs as competitors. We see this also in pitting programs against each other in the reprioritization process, which requires people to participate in selecting programs to sacrifice.

xii. It is only with budgetary dark glasses on that we can claim that this decision will cost a small group consequences in order to minimize the consequences for the greater body. The long term consequences of not having a program have to be thought through on other than purely monetary grounds, and even within the framework of monetary considerations the losses of good will and future students, though difficult to fix numbers to them, have not been adequately addressed.

xiii. There are some arguments that the University has a duty to mount some minimum variety of offerings in foreign languages, which minimum we are below now. We would be seriously derelict without German.

One other thing: There seems to be a conviction within the subcommittee (perhaps shared by some other administrators and faculty) that the faculty representative is really impervious to arguments in favor of discontinuing German because of allegiance to an entrenched position. It's hard to reply to this. I certainly do think our language offerings even with German are less than any self-respecting University would provide. I certainly do think that there is a management mindset which automatically assumes that budgetary realities are more important than educational or curricular or emotional factors and I do think that all those arguments have to be called out and weighed on the balance before decisions are made.—and that those who make the budgetary arguments have a duty to respond to the others, and that the faculty have a duty to respond to the budget issues. From my position, it seems that the problem is on the other side, that those who have been dealing with the agony of terrible budget problems now suffer from their own tunnel vision, that they cannot do their jobs without shielding their eyes from nonbudgetary consequences.

But in the face of this problem that perhaps people on both sides are not able to listen to opposing views, there is a traditional and clearly appropriate response, that those arguing have to provide responses to opposing arguments. There's a lot of that in the binder on one side but little on the other. And to the extent I'm doing that, I see

my job as helping keep people honest. If we do make this decision, I will insist that we acknowledge its tragic nature, and I will rebuke those who portray the discontinuation of German as though it is somehow a matter of fact, rational decision, a decision about the greatest good for the greatest number, without costs to all of us. There are other costs, many of which we have not tried to figure out. jwp
(E-mail jwp2)

P.S. added after 15 April 08 Senate meeting: The Monetary Savings Arguments:

There are competing claims, that the University will save money sometime or other by cutting the German program and later other programs, vs. claims that that thinking is incomplete and that the cut of German will either save very little or will cost the University more than it will save. I was disappointed that neither side offered point by point responses.

So, first, I want to try to unpack main pieces of the argument for the claim that cutting German will save money. I want to do this partly because it seems to me that the arguments that we will save money tend to be truncated and involve too much thinking of the "it just stands to reason" genre, and nevertheless some people who should understand them pretty well do give them some credence. Saeed Mortazavi was granting that maybe 50,000.00 might be saved, although that was along the way to saying that 50K is not enough to justify the impatience of cutting now rather than waiting for the more broad comparisons that would occur in reprioritization.

We should be able to excavate the thinking. The Provost did provide some remarks at the Senate. I took him to be saying something like the following:

a. Cutting e.g. Home Ec in the past means that we are not now having to give money to pay Home Ec teachers and support staff, and how could that not be saving money? Not rehiring in German when the full professor position is vacated by retirement, and backing that professor now or soon into the language proficiency classes taught by lecturers--both of these steps provide budgetary savings.

b. We do not need to take into account potential losses of students because we have students coming out our ears and any losses will immediately be covered by others waiting to get in, and besides, for now we are not being paid based on enrollments anyway.

c. ---mmm. Is there a c.? Maybe this will be easier than I thought.

Jack Stoob already made the remark that the Provost's position seems to require that a pessimistic view of future budgets be true. I pointed out that the Provost is not quite saying that there will be no costs from lost enrollments but rather is saying that the costs will be easily paid because we have access to a fountain of youths.

The economic analyses offered in the binder by LaBahn, the UCC, and Jack Stoob do involve taking loss of future revenues from loss of students into account. They also stress efficiency in the German program--comparatively high enrollments per faculty, so Student/Faculty ratios, and graduation numbers per FTEF, the "comparatively" based on CAHSS figures which are already generally higher than in the other colleges. (I confess these efficiency arguments drive me mad, since the frequent opposition between these kinds of efficiency and quality has to get obscured before one is allowed into the ring.)

Future revenue hits from lost students are, to put it gently, hard to pin down. However, we can tell that they mount up fast. The University's budget is roughly a hundred million for roughly 7,000 students. Really roughly, that's fourteen thousand per student, 3K of that paid by the student. But adding a student doesn't get us 14K, (nor does adding a hundred students get us 1.4 million)--there's lots of slippage, especially now.

There are some areas where there is no slippage, mainly fees paid on campus which remain on campus. We do get application fees (\$471K for 07/08), nonresident fees (1,607K), and State University Fees (21 million at 3K per student, scheduled to go up 10% for next year). Those are more solid. The University Budget Committee hardly looks at revenues, and almost never except as information items, since we never have decision-making power over those. State General Fund Support to HSU for 07/08 was 76.2 Million. For the nonce that number has come disconnected from our enrollment, and in the last documents I have was to be reduced for 08/09 to 73.4

million. Someday enrollment will once again determine that figure for General Fund Support, and HSU is working hard to make sure that when that happens it results in an increase rather than a decrease. We don't want, though, to have more students than we have classes to serve them. I've had two administrators tell me with pride that GE sections are being scheduled with very few empty seats, as though that is not already harming retention and enrollment.

Another relevant factor has to do with that locus of decision-making, which comes with a built-in structural bias toward making cuts. Budgets are being made by units (e.g., colleges, the health center, human resources, grounds maintenance, public safety), but revenues do not come to units with the exception of some offices which collect fees. The 21 million in State University Fees comes to the University as a whole, and the State General Fund's 70-odd million ditto. People who are told to cut budgets can do so with no consideration for those two largish numbers for revenue, usually for good grounds. If they do affect revenue, though, a directive to cut budgets gives them incentive to hide their eyes from any effects on revenue.

Case in point. This summer's course offerings were cut basically in half as a budgetary cost-cutting measure, from the equivalent of about eighty 3-credit sections in Summer 07 to the equivalent of 34 this coming summer. In Summer 07, the three colleges spent 578K on summer. The 08 summer budget is not yet where I can see it, but it seems fair that it will come in somewhere around half the previous summer. This looks like a help for our budget, reducing expenditures by somewhere up near 300K.

But. Always the but, and in this case the but has to do exactly with administrators holding up their hands to both sides of their eyes. The income purely from the State University Fee for Summer Session 07, (so leaving out the extra fees charged with many classes, leaving out the General Fund monies for 200 annualized FTES back when we were getting that, and leaving out other fees) is 799 K. In other words, S.U.F.'s alone paid more than \$220 K over what summer cost. In other words, a three-credit section cost Academic Affairs \$7,000.00 and brought in (admittedly not to OAA but to the University) \$10,000.00, without including any enrollment-based monies other than S.U.F.'s and without including extra fees. (There's more to this story--I can share the e-mail note I wrote to the Provost and the President, and a report on my conversation with them about this. A few factors are the following: Lecturers get benefits for summer, but tenured and tenure track faculty already have those paid, evening out somewhat, and sometimes more than evening out, the high expected costs involved of having professors teach summer. Thinking many of the enrollments can simply be displaced to the academic year leaves out the impact of the added S.U.F.s paid with separate summer enrollments. Half this coming summer session will be in Business, whose courses were mostly restored, partially because the business students made a case, apparently a convincing case, that the classes pay for themselves.)

The administration seems to be dismissive of talk about future losses in student enrollments because they are difficult to estimate and we are currently flush with students, but they seem to have neglected them entirely in the case of summer school, and have probably thereby hurt our budget by, say, more than twice (using Saeed's figure) what is going to be saved per year by cutting German. Further, they are relying on claims about future enrollments, and present enrollments, which are problematic. Claiming the cuts in faculty salaries from elimination of Home Ec as though they are helps to our budget requires we count the monies Home Ec would have made from enrolling students be figured in at zero. That seems, well, let's say implausible. And at any rate using that as an argument regarding German requires making claims about future demand which are no more solid than those claims which support the opposite view that cutting German will not save money but instead will cost us money. (I pass over any issue about whether the future students who replace those enrolled in German are likely to be of similar quality.)

What should we conclude about the monetary arguments? It's not as clean as either side would like. The administration arguments do not take into account possible lost revenues from closing the program. Their case depends on optimistic enrollment projections and on pessimistic budget projections, both of which might turn out true. The savings which are to result were certainly overstated at first and the new much lower figures may still be overstated. (One commentator to whom I sent a rough draft of these additional paragraphs said that the alleged savings in the first few years would not pay for half the time which has gone into our dithering about the proposal.) If the burden is on those recommending cutting German, they have done an inadequate job. "Inadequate" may be an overly polite term. Since a strong case, or at least a clear case, is called for, I myself now regard the case for discontinuation as an embarrassment to those who make it. (Comments to jwp2)