

MUNICH/AUGSBURG CAMPUSES: MASTERING THE ART OF BEING A STUDENT

Tom Hudgins
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In 1950 the University of Maryland College of Special and Continuation Studies (which later became University of Maryland University College) established a two-year residential campus in Munich, Germany, for the college-age children of U.S. military and civilian government employees, including diplomats, stationed abroad. Most of the students were 18- to 21-year-olds whose parents were stationed in Europe; a few had parents working in Africa or the Middle East; and even fewer were older adults (e.g., spouses of Americans working abroad who wanted to take some of the courses offered at the Munich Campus). The Munich Campus provided college courses and Associate's degrees for thousands of students before the post-Cold War military drawdown in Europe led to the closing of McGraw Kaserne, the U.S. Army base where the campus was located, and the relocation of the campus to Reese Kaserne in Augsburg in 1992. (In 1994, it moved again, to Turley Barracks in Mannheim, and finally closed in 2005.)

I taught Economics at the Munich Campus from 1983-1992 and at the Augsburg from 1992-1993. In 1985, my wife Sharon and I also team-taught a course in Mass Communications, for the Munich Campus Honors Program.

In the late 1980s, the Munich Campus introduced a new, 1-credit-hour course listed in the catalogue as EDCP 108: College Aims, which was required of all students in their first semester there. Classes were held once a week, for an hour, and grading was on a Pass/Fail basis. At first, all the students grumbled about the new requirement, especially the older ones and those who had already taken courses at other colleges. But by the end of the course many of them thanked their instructors for helping them to become better students.

A small group of professors at the Munich Campus was asked to teach College Aims, one or two sections every term (for overload pay). I don't exactly know the administration's criteria for selecting those professors, but I was told that they were the ones who the dean and Faculty Council considered to be the best teachers on campus. All of them were people who regularly taught in other disciplines—social sciences, humanities, languages, natural sciences. My wife, who taught in the European Division, felt honored to be the only "outside" professor asked to teach College Aims at the Munich Campus, too. Both of us taught those courses every semester from 1989 to 1992 in Munich, then from 1992-1993 at the Augsburg Campus.

The purpose of College Aims was to help students succeed throughout their college career. Attendance and classroom participation were required, including 12 in-class written tests or quizzes, group activities and role-playing, and written assignments outside of class. The textbook, *Becoming a Master Student*, by Dave Ellis, focused on the tools, techniques, and skills necessary for succeeding in college. Within the broad parameters of the program, teachers were given wide latitude on how they wanted to structure the course, what they chose to focus on in class, and how they conducted their own classes. Especially when the program was first

introduced, all the College Aims instructors also met to swap ideas and share successful techniques that they had used in their own classes. For all of us who taught in the program, it was a good experience of collegial cooperation toward a shared goal.

We covered a lot of ground in the College Aims course. Practical study skills included goal setting, recognizing the difference between realistic and unrealistic goals, and finding paths to achieving goals; planning, time management, and overcoming procrastination; reading comprehension and vocabulary building; techniques for improving memory, concentration, and focusing on tasks; strategies for taking tests (true-false, multiple choice, short and long essay questions); research paper writing (including citing sources and avoiding plagiarism); critical thinking and recognizing the difference between facts and opinions. We also devised practical exercises to acquaint students with useful resources, from personal/behavioral to library sources, which could help them succeed in their other college courses.

We also included activities related to the students own personalities, activities that really resonated with them: writing journal entries about communicating feelings and ideas to other students, and learning to be a good listener; self-awareness and personal values; bias awareness (ethnic, cultural, racial, religious, gender); stress management and biofeedback; fostering creativity (left-brain/right-brain thinking, brainstorming techniques); conflict resolution; and self-evaluations. We also invited a guest speaker to talk about the problem of alcohol abuse among college students.

It sounds ambitious to cover all that in one semester. But the combination of enthusiastic professors, a good textbook, and creative classroom techniques got the students involved in their own learning and made most of them aware of how they could apply what they learned in College Aims to the other courses they were taking that semester and in the future.

While holding students to high standards, we also tried to make all the activities fun, interesting, and relevant to the students' lives. One of the most effective tools, which all the instructors used, was a self-reporting questionnaire about the students' temperament types (or personality types), based on the 100-question Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, but using the slightly shorter test published in the book, *Please Understand Me*, by David Keirse and Marilyn Bates. Although there have been many criticisms of both measurement tools, the students themselves felt that their personality characteristics measured by the test were accurate. We used those results to help students become more aware of their own learning styles (and those of other people); how they related to, and worked with, other people (classmates, roommates, family members); how to cultivate and improve interpersonal relationships; and what professions might be best suited for their own personality type.

At the end of the course, students were also required to fill out a detailed Course Evaluation Form—and we used that feedback to improve our own classes in the following semester. We were especially interested in what they said about how taking the course had changed or improved them as students.

Teaching that course required a significant time commitment by the instructor: planning each class meeting, coming up with creative activities, preparing materials (quizzes, handouts),

and grading assignments. Each class meeting was very different from the others, with no one-size-fits-all format. But by the end of the term, both the professors and the students agreed that the time and effort required for teaching and taking the course was well worth it. And for the students, we hoped it would have a significant effect on their future success in college, as well as providing the tools for coping with other aspects of their lives beyond the classroom.

I lauded the Munich and Augsburg campuses for making that course a required part of their curriculum—and those of us who taught in the European Division, too, always hoped that it would become a requirement for students enrolled in that division. But, at least during my time teaching for UMUC abroad, the only other division where it was offered was in the Russia Program. (See Sharon Hudgins' forthcoming Memoir Project essay: UMUC's Program in Russia.)

European Division (1975-1978; 1981-1993)

Asian Division (1978-1979)

Munich Campus (1983-1992)

Augsburg Campus (1992-1993)

Russia Program (1993-1995)