

Language Policies at the University of Siegen

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Preamble

The University of Siegen regards both linguistic and cultural diversity as key components in internationalization. At the individual and the institutional level, language policies impact not only excellence in research and instruction, but also the establishment of a courteous and respectful interpersonal environment. This document provides concrete details on the structure of internationalization at the university, which is based on opportunities for language acquisition and practical use of language in the wider university context. It furthermore serves as a record for the various decisions regarding language policy that have been made to date, while also establishing a framework for future decisions. It sets standards, formulates recommendations, and is intended to provide orientation to employees, instructors, and current students, as well as for prospective students and (international) partners.

The University of Siegen prioritizes multilingualism not just at the level of instruction and research, but also in particular in the sense of a ‘culture of welcoming,’ with multilingualism woven into every facet of research, instruction, work, and study at the university.

1. Studying and Instruction

The academic program at the University of Siegen is oriented both regionally and internationally. The range of courses offered in languages other than German is being welcomed and expanded, without diminishing German’s role as a language of teaching and science. Multilingualism and intercultural competency are points of emphasis and respect.

Languages and intercultural competencies in studying and instruction

The University of Siegen promotes the learning of new languages and cultural perspectives for all members of the university community. One important hub for this effort is the university's Language Center (Sprachenzentrum). As a central institution, its services are available to all members of the University of Siegen community. The Language Center offers general and special purpose language courses and tests, as well as advising on language learning and instruction (in cooperation with the Center for Academic Teaching (Zentrum zur Förderung der Hochschullehre, ZFH) and a limited number of courses in key qualifications.

Language and communication skills for students

In addition to the regular academic program, students at the University of Siegen can also take language and communications courses. Courses at the Language Center can be booked based on their degree program (as a free or required electives) or as extracurricular coursework.

The portfolio of key skills is focused on competency with academic texts and discourse (especially in German, German as a Foreign Language (DaF), German as a Second Language (DaZ), and English) as well as professional communications skills, with a strong focus on intercultural content.

Language courses can, among other benefits, contribute to the development of multilingualism and intercultural competency. In the areas of DaF/DaZ and English, the goal is to qualify students to take advantage of German and English as languages for instruction and research. For degree programs where German or English stands in focus as a foreign language-of-instruction, cooperations are established with the Language Center to support students (such as in DaF based on DSH/TestDaF, or in academic writing). Programs that span across various departments and status groups, such as language tandems or buddy programs, promote intercultural and linguistic exchange, which in turn leads to greater internationalization at home as well as student mobility.

Language and communication skills for instructors

For successful design of foreign-language instruction (in English or German, for example), instructors need the linguistic and intercultural skills at the foundation of instruction and advising in a foreign language. DaF and English courses from the Language Center, among others, are open to international instructors. In addition to the general language course offerings, the University of Siegen also supports special language learning courses for instructors. A modular set of courses for researchers and instructors in the field of DaF is held on a regular basis. In the area of English, the same holds true for English for Teaching Staff, a flexible coaching and teaching program. The House of Young Talents (HYT) offers English-language events for post-graduates to improve their language abilities in a research context (including topics such as presenting at conferences and literature review). The Center for Academic Teaching (ZHF), as part of the Hochschuldidaktik NRW network, offers didactic continuing education courses in English on a regular basis.

The Spectrum of Languages — Prioritization

The language course offerings are intended to expand multilingualism and skills, especially in German and English. The selection of languages and the levels at which those languages are offered is based on demand and the following criteria:

Successful Studying

German and English as foreign languages

The Language Center offers a program of DaF courses parallel to the semester, conveying German skills ranging from A1 to C1 to exchange students and international degree-seeking students in English-language degree programs.

International degree-seeking students in German-language degree programs are prepared for their studies by the STARTING (Student Admission, Registration and Training in German Language) department and can, after successful completion of the DSH-II examination, begin a degree program in German.

To promote the best opportunities for successful studies in courses conducted in German, it is essential that both native speakers and international students receive equivalent opportunities to develop and use academic language. This is achieved, and constantly expanded, at the University of Siegen through a closely interwoven network of actors (including the faculties themselves, the Language Center, the Center for Academic Teaching (ZHF), House of Young Talents (HYT), and the Center for Academic Writing (Zentrum für akademisches Schreiben, ZefaS)).

The same applies to courses offered in English. There are close ties between the fundamental offerings of the Language Center (English courses from A2 to C1, technical language courses, and academic writing) and the supplemental offerings from other units (see above).

Languages anchored in the curriculum (free or required electives)

Independent from mastery of the language of instruction, successful studies are also shaped by successful completion of language modules in languages anchored in the curriculum. The Language Center offers programs in language for special purposes as well as a variety of language modules that can be incorporated into the Studium Generale (interfaculty lectures) or the free electives and/or required electives.

Encouraging mobility (for students and employees)

Incoming: Feasibility of learning agreements/study plans

Few incoming exchange students possess sufficient mastery of German to take coursework in that language; in response, the faculties should, wherever feasible, offer English-language alternatives or supplements to German-language courses, not least to increase the attractiveness of the university for incoming students. It is furthermore important that this group have access to language courses reliably covering the language-relevant portions of their learning agreements or study plans. Routine discussions are held with the International Student Affairs (ISA) department to clarify offerings and demand for the incoming students.

Outgoing: Linguistic and cultural preparation for stays abroad

Given that the acquisition of at least one additional language (beyond German and English) is a helpful preparatory step toward a successful stay abroad in non-Anglophone countries, the University of Siegen provides appropriate support in this process.

As an aid to Siegen students, instructors, and researchers in their mobility projects, the Language Center offers a selected range of potential languages, with challenging learning curves and in some cases intensive formats. External accreditation (UNICert) is a measure for confirming and safeguarding the quality of the language instruction for the long term. The Language Center serves as a test center for standardized language tests, which among other uses can be required to apply for university spots abroad. The language portfolio is intentionally crafted to match those of the university's partnerships and strategic networks and is re-evaluated on an ongoing basis.

Employability and promotion of multilingualism

Professional profile building

The University of Siegen supports its students in their preparations to enter the labor market. German-language students are recommended to learn at least one language beyond English at an advanced level. Foreign-language students should, after completion of their studies, have at least B2-level mastery of German to improve their prospects on the German labor market. The International Office (IO) also maintains a diverse range of offerings covering different intercultural aspects (such as workshops on applications) and presents the region's potential employers with opportunities to hire international graduates, while also educating them on challenges associated with this choice.

Multilingualism

The University of Siegen is aware that multilingualism enriches the university community and that promoting multilingual ability significantly improves the opportunities for job seekers and the quality of the careers they ultimately end up pursuing. It is important and desired, depending on the demand, to foster students in the languages spoken in their homes or by heritage. This is typically expressed through special courses in languages such as Russian or Turkish. Guided foreign language acquisition, preferably in languages with no prior school experience, offers students the opportunity to become sensitive and competent ambassadors for multilingualism.

2. Academics and Research

As part of its multilingualism policies, the University of Siegen promotes German and English as its academic languages, while also encouraging other research languages of importance to the structure of the academic departments. Linguistic support is provided to international and local researchers, guest researchers, and research alumni, helping them integrate into daily German research work and participate in international research exchanges and publications.

Goals and Expectations

Researchers at the University of Siegen possess linguistic competencies of at least C1 in the primary research language. Even if the majority of research is conducted in German, researchers should possess or acquire C1 skills in English to ensure their ability to network internationally. Support offerings from the Language Center (such as general language courses, courses on academic writing, presenting, or English for teaching staff) as well offerings from the House of Young Talents (HYT) play an important role in this. International researchers whose primary research and working language is English are supported in the acquisition of German language skills (such as through general and special course offerings by the Language Center).

Recruiting and support of international researchers

The University of Siegen seeks to increase its share of international researchers. One method for achieving this is by generally posting open professorships on international job portals; another is expanding the culture of welcoming at the University itself, as well as in the city and region.

International researchers are afforded the opportunity to sign up for general and special purpose German courses through the Language Center as well as to take part in special “German as a Foreign Language” offerings for employees. The University of Siegen promotes receptive language skills to encourage for rapid integration into the daily working life and academic self-

management. To promote teaching skills in the academic languages of German and English, the Center for Academic Teaching (ZHF) offers courses in university teaching skills in German and English that can potentially lead to a certificate in “Professional Teaching Skills at the University Level.”

Promotion of Research Mobility

Siegen researchers are supported in their international networking and profile building through targeted language-related courses. Based on demand, the House of Young Talents (HYT) offers a certain number of events in English, helping researchers prepare at a content and linguistic level for international networking. The International Office (IO) also provides consulting and support for researchers looking to conduct stays abroad for research and instruction.

3. Daily Life at the University

The University of Siegen welcomes international members of the university community and sees itself as responsible for offering important information for studying, instruction, and researching in at least two languages, namely German and English. To achieve this goal, it promotes multilingualism among its employees.

Administration and services

Campus life at the University of Siegen is primarily conducted in German. The University of Siegen is nevertheless interested in providing key points of communication concerning orientation and organization in English,¹ including for example translations of relevant forms, examination regulations, and flyers as well as a style guide and glossary to help provide orientation on English language usage for all members of the university community.

Both general as well as English for Special Purposes courses, as well as all other language courses from the Language Center, are available to administrative employees. The “Zertifikat Internationales – Interkulturelle Kompetenz für die Verwaltung” (International Skills Certificate — Intercultural Competency for Administration) has also been introduced to acknowledge work towards intercultural sensitization of technical and administrative staff.

Communication and public image

Important internal communication is always offered in German and English, including for example emails sent out via the university-wide server or important press releases. Home pages and other appropriate materials (i.e., flyers) oriented toward various target audiences (current students, potential students, researchers, teachers, etc.) should also be made available in German and English.

As the initiator of the “Willkommen in Siegen/ Welcome in Siegen” network,² the university is seeking to drive movement in the region while also identifying the needs of its members. It supports guests at a linguistic level with administrative procedures, such as in preparing important documents or with a support person for appointments at official agencies.

4. Implementation of language policies

The Senate of the University of Siegen provides comment on language policy, while the university administration sustains and supports it with content and execution. As part of the University’s quality management system, the relevant actors are in constant contact. The board of advisors for the Language Center³ evaluates the implementation and updates to the language policy on a 3-year cycle.