Berlin, summer 2018: a lovely time for a group of students to learn more about Germany’s capital by visiting the city itself. They were part of a Berlin seminar organized by Professor Nina Woll of the Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières. Eight of these students received a travel scholarship from the Centre’s Fred and Ruth Stork German Studies Awards.

Dear Members and Friends of the Waterloo Centre for German Studies:

It’s my pleasure to provide you with an update on the activities of the Waterloo Centre for German Studies at the University of Waterloo. The Centre has had another splendid year facilitating research into the society and culture of the German-speaking world, helping students (like those from the Université du Québec above) spend time in Europe, and organizing events and cultural programming for the Waterloo Region. This letter will give you some of the highlights from the past year and tell you about some of our upcoming plans.

Our past year was marked by a change in administrative staff. Lori Straus, who had been with the Centre since 2013, left to devote herself to some of her own projects and to pursue a PhD. Luckily, Lori’s replacement is just as capable and efficient. Misty Matthews-Roper joined the Centre in January 2018 and has been making her mark with her professionalism and organizational skills.

Which is good, because there is a lot to organize! This past year we undertook a survey of the Centre’s activities from 2012 to 2017, and the results are impressive. In a period of a little over five years, the Centre has sponsored over 90 separate activities. These range from large-scale research initiatives such as organizing colloquia to much smaller affairs such as providing support to classes to attend German-themed film or stage presentations. What’s most impressive from my point-of-view is that so many of the Centre’s activities, being open to anyone, serve to bring the general public into contact with the scholarly exploration of German-language culture and society.
This past year was no exception in that regard. In cooperation with the Austrian Cultural Forum and Conrad Grebel University College, we helped organize the standing-room only recital of Anna Magdalena Kokits, a young Austrian pianist who toured Canada as part of Government of Austria’s celebration of Canada’s 150th birthday. University of Waterloo President Feridun Hamdullahpur, Conrad Grebel leaders Jim Pankratz and Marlene Epp, and Austrian Cultural Forum Director Bernhard Faustenhammer were all in attendance. The evening of the recital was also the opening of the Forum’s exhibition CALLIOPE Austria – Women in Society, Culture and the Sciences. The Centre contributed towards the cost of mounting that touring exhibition, and it was wonderful to see so many people taking it in. We’ve also started cooperating with the embassies of Switzerland, Germany, and Austria to bring German-language films to the Princess Cinema in Waterloo each May.

The Centre was also very happy to support a two-day colloquium and workshop organized by Andrea Speltz and Barbara Schmenk. “The Role of the Imagination in German Educational Thought” attracted some 40 people who spent two days thinking about how the imagination can be educated in the pursuit of social justice. Other events this past year included a workshop organized by Alice Kuzniar on the Romantic poet Novalis that featured York professor Joan Steigerwald, and we were also happy to host a reading at the Open Sesame Shop in Kitchener with Carl Skoggard introducing us to his new translation of Siegfried Kracauer’s novel Georg. The sponsorship of research can take other forms as well: in 2017 editors Michael Boehringer, Belinda Kleinhan, and Allison Cattell published a volume of essays, Belief Systems in Austrian Literature, Thought and Culture, that was subsidized by the centre, and scholars Emma Betz, Alice Kuzniar, and Angelica Fenner received grants to support their research endeavours.

Thanks to a surplus in our Fred and Ruth Stork German Study Awards fund, we were able to award more travel scholarships than usual. A little advertising was all it took to attract applications from across the country. Many Canadian universities offer excellent study abroad opportunities in German-speaking Europe, and the Centre is very happy to support these expensive undertakings with modest but extremely helpful scholarships. 35 students from across Canada – including 10 from the University of Waterloo - received support to attend programs in Kassel, Bamberg, Mannheim, and Berlin. The Centre
also continues to manage the Cecilia and Late George Piller Graduate Research Award, available to excellent UW students researching any aspect of the German-speaking world. The upcoming year promises to be a very good one for the Centre. The 2018 Grimm Lecture, the flagship lecture series of the Waterloo Centre for German Studies, will be held on Thursday, September 20th, 2018, at 7pm at the Balsillie School of International Affairs in Waterloo. 2018 is the bicentennial of Karl Marx’s birth and, love him or hate him, his impact on human history can’t be ignored. Cambridge professor Gareth Stedman Jones, FBA, well known for his exhaustive 2016 biography of Karl Marx, will be delivering a lecture on whether it’s possible to separate Marx from Marxism. And on Wednesday, October 24th, 2018, at 7pm, also at the Balsillie School, indigenous playwright and filmmaker Drew Hayden Taylor will screen his CBC documentary “Searching for Winnetou” about the continuing German fascination for the romanticized version of the Old West found in Karl May novels and summer western festivals. This will be a great opportunity to consider issues surrounding cultural appropriation in Germany.

Since taking on the directorship of the Centre a year ago, I have been reviewing past activities and, along with the Centre’s Executive Committee, thinking about where the Centre needs to be focusing its energies and resources. The University of Waterloo is incredibly fortunate to have an institute like the Waterloo Centre for German Studies; not many research institutes have the opportunity or ability to connect with a larger public the way we are able to do. It’s very important that the Centre continue to maintain a presence in both the scholarly and public realms in order to help bridge the gap that often divides the two, and we are exploring ways of doing just that. One new initiative that is already underway is the WCGS Book Prize. This prize has been established to recognize books published in 2017 that improve our understanding of any aspect of German-speaking society. One of the award’s criteria is the book’s potential to contribute to broader public discourses.

In next year’s annual report, I’ll be able to tell you about the winning book. In the meantime, I encourage you to connect with the Centre via Facebook, Twitter (@uWaterlooWCGS), or our website (www.wcgs.ca) where you can also sign up for our mailing list. And please feel free to get in touch with questions or comments by emailing us at wcgs@uwaterloo.ca.

With sincere thanks for your support,

James M. Skidmore, Director
skidmore@uwaterloo.ca | 519.888.4567, x33687