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David Huenlich, Germanic studies assistant instructor, speaks Wednesday night about a role-playing game he designed to help students learn language in an interactive way.

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TAGS

assistant, David Huenlich

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BY [ZAINAB CALCUTTAWALA](#)

Two Germanic studies assistant instructors have designed a “Dungeons and Dragons”-style course that will facilitate language learning.

The course would have students role play the historical events surrounding the Meuseback-Comanche Treaty in 1847, which solidified collaboration between early German settlers in Texas and the Comanche tribe.

The course model aims to maximize intermediate-level language students’ interaction with the German culture and encourage the creative use of grammatical structures and vocabulary that have been taught previously, according to the course designers who spoke Wednesday at a talk the Texas Language Center hosted.

The desire for a more interactive classroom environment arose because assessments took up significant amount of class time, and the existing model did not foster cultural learning in a natural way, according to David Huenlich, Germanic studies assistant instructor and co-creator.

“We found that we spend a whole week of class time on mostly written assessments, which was too much for our taste,” Huenlich said.

“Another thing we noticed was that, although we loved bringing in culture into the classroom, the topics jumped from one day to other. We would talk about Opernhaus one day and the Berlin Wall on another day.”

The students would go through two weeks of introductory material that would cover the rules of the game and relevant vocabulary, followed by 10 weeks of role-playing in which students would think and act as their assigned historical character.

Huenlich said the innovative classroom environment immerses students in the historical scenario and makes sure the students interact with the language and learn cultural concepts thoroughly.

Contextualizing a role-playing game to a historical narrative allows instructors to bring primary sources into the classroom, according to Germanic studies lecturer James Kearney.

“There are actually readings from primary texts from the historical figures of German immigration,” Kearney said. “The texts are wonderful — not too difficult in German and include important grammatical concepts, like subjunctives, that could be used in the class.”

The role-playing class structure does not need to be limited to German classrooms because it can be easily tweaked according to the target language, said Adams LaBorde, Germanic studies assistant lecturer and course co-creator.

“The actual game mechanics do not really care about what language they are in, so it would be easy to apply the French Revolution or the Cultural Revolution in China or the end of the samurai era in Japan to the model,” LaBorde said. “It is very universal.”

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