

Claire Darmstadter

Hey everybody, I am so excited to be joined today by Greta Wiederhold UW-Eau Claire student with a German education major and TESOL minor. Thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me.

So it would be great if you could first give us an overview of your education and linguistic background and why you chose this particular degree track.

Greta Wiederhold

So, I started taking German back in eighth grade. And I took it all throughout high school. And now I'm in my third year in college, so I've been in German classes for what, eight years or so now, a while. So a lot of the reasons for why I chose German was one, I sort of expected to choose the language. But I picked German specifically because I have German ancestors. So it really interests me to figure out more about my ancestry and that sort of stuff. Besides German, in high school, I also started speaking Spanish. So I have a few years of high school and college Spanish. And also last year, I started taking Chinese just for fun. So languages for me, were definitely something interesting that I wanted to learn more about. And the linguistic components also really interest me, like learning the different grammar, syntax and everything of the languages is pretty cool.

Claire Darmstadter

And so like you kind of mentioned, there are a lot of people in Wisconsin that have German heritage, but there are not tons of German language programs throughout the state. So are you thinking of staying in Wisconsin to teach or there may be other states that are more hospitable to German education perhaps?

Greta Wiederhold

I might say in Wisconsin, I'm not sure, I'm from Minnesota. So in some ways, I sort of feel like I might end up back in Minnesota, just since that's where I'm from. But the longer I've been here in Wisconsin, the more I think there might be some good positions here. And a good way to start out and really work on some German programs here, specifically, since there's so many students that have that German heritage.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. And since obviously, there's not a lot of German programs, there's also not a lot of German educators. So I met you virtually through a language education conference online. But are there any ways that you've been able to connect with any pre-service or current German language educators or even outside the state? Are there any ways that you can kind of find those connections and learn a little bit what the field is like?

Greta Wiederhold

A lot of the connections have been through my university, because with the German program there, we can connect with different people. But also through the online FLES Fest conference, I just recently was able to observe an online German class. So that's another connection I

wouldn't have had without that. So it's a lot of it being a close knit community. And once you're part of the community, a lot of people know each other, and you get to meet people that way.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure, and as a non-native speaker, it can be difficult at times to feel confident in your language skills, and especially within the US system, you know, we're not learning language until a lot later than most kids around the world, in many cases. So do you ever feel like you're behind in the development of your skills? I know, you studied abroad, I think about a year or two ago before COVID, so can you talk a little bit about how that maybe helped you develop your language skills and any other tips or tricks or things you've done to kind of help yourself feel very confident in your abilities?

Greta Wiederhold

Yeah, that's definitely a big problem sometimes is going to this non native, wanting to teach the language in this time, when you feel like you're lacking the study abroad, for sure made a difference. And some ways when I first got there, it showed me where I am very much lacking, but then it helped me to develop more about it. For me, I studied in Austria, which is known to have an interesting dialect which was pretty different than the standard you learn in school. So that was my hardest part was getting there and realizing that everyone talks different than how I learned in school, but it was a really great time to take that and see how it's actually used in daily life for people and then learn from that way. So I think that really helped a non-native speaker to get more comfortable like being in that setting with native speakers.

Claire Darmstadter

And how do you feel about how language is viewed on campus in general? Is it celebrated especially given the linguistic diversity of Eau Claire? Does it depend on the language or --

Greta Wiederhold

I think it depends on the language a little bit. Obviously, Spanish is the most popular and French and German are not quite as popular. So there's sometimes a difference with that. It's, it's not entirely celebrated, I would say, I think a lot of times it gets forgotten more than anything else. And I think it's sometimes annoying how people don't quite realize the amount of work that language majors have to put in, compared to I mean, of course, every study in its own way has long hard work. But just sometimes I think they forget, like how much effort goes in for these language teachers, the future language teachers and how much they really have to have motivation and passion for it. So I don't think that's celebrated enough.

Claire Darmstadter

Right. It's one thing to speak the language but then to teach it that is like a whole nother level of skill. So it's definitely a challenge that many people might not recognize. So finally, we tell kids all the time that speaking more than one language is a superpower. So if you can boil it down to just one ,can you give me one reason, you can answer English and German, and I think you said Chinese, Spanish, whatever you want to answer, why we should view speaking more than one language as a superpower.

Greta Wiederhold

I think the biggest superpower I can give you is just connecting to other people and other cultures. That's the most important part.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. Thank you so much. I hope you have a great rest of your semester. I hope everything is COVID is at least manageable. And I'm excited for your future students who will have a great teacher.

Greta Wiederhold

Oh, thank you so much. I'm excited to see what comes out of this project.