What will you actually be learning and studying in the English Department? What are the courses like?

Part 1: What kind of language skills would you learn at the university? What is Academic English \((\text{Sprachpraxis})\)?

The Academic English courses are designed to ensure that you have the foundational language skills necessary to succeed in your other courses in the English Department. You will learn and practice skills in these courses that you may not necessarily learn in your other literature, linguistics, or cultural studies seminars but that you might be expected to know.

For example, your lecturers for Oral Communication will critique your pronunciation, accent, grammatical accuracy, fluency, lexical proficiency, and soft skills in an oral presentation. While other courses may place more of an emphasis on the content of what you are saying, your professors will still expect you to be able to speak fluently, correctly, and with a natural accent.

Translation courses are also designed to help you in your overall studies. The focus of the translation courses (German to English) does not teach word-for-word translation; your lecturers will encourage you to analyze and do basic genre analyses of the texts.

Lastly, Written Communication courses focus on the structure and development of argument in a longer piece of writing (essay/Aufsatz or term paper/Hausarbeit). Your lecturers will stress the importance of a clear, argumentative thesis and well-developed and logical body paragraphs that support your thesis.

Part 2: What is English Linguistics?

Our linguistics courses at the English Department are designed to help you understand the nature and development of the English language. This includes its various manifestations throughout the centuries and around the world as a native or official second language.

Some topics that you will learn about:
- What is Standard English and what do you know about its development?
- Have you heard of Kachru’s concentric circles? Try Google!
- What is the difference between Received Pronunciation and Estuary English?
- What does the study of the structure and meaning of the English language tell us about the nature of our mind?

You will learn to analyse and describe speakers’ grammatical knowledge of English. Our courses focus on how words and word sequences are pronounced and articulated (phonetics & phonology), how sentences are built (syntax), and how words and grammatical structures contribute to the construction of meaning (semantics).

Later, we ask more challenging questions:
- Compare “tall”, “eighth”, “tray” and “bottle” with regard to how the English “t” sound can be articulated.
- What is special about “The horse raced past the barn fell”?
- How are different constructions in English built, what do they mean and how are they processed? E.g. “If you feel threatened in a taxi, firmly ask the driver to stop and get out”.
Analyse the following joke by Groucho Marx: “While hunting in Africa, I shot an elephant in my pajamas. – How an elephant got into my pajamas I'll never know.”

Why do we often smile (or get angry) if a sentence means more than one thing? E.g. “Jackie Child's youngest daughter was just two when she was jailed for manslaughter nine years ago.”

What do slips of the tongue reveal? E.g. “They underestimated what the campaign was about.” (Bushism)

You will also study language in communication and analyse how speakers strategically communicate and understand meaning intentions with the help of contextual information and world knowledge. You will reach out beyond sentences and look at written and spoken texts and conversations (pragmatics and discourse analysis). This will enable you to build bridges between linguistics and literary studies.

Some of the things you will be able to understand:
Indirect speech acts, e.g. “Do you have a watch?
Assigning reference: (when? who? where?), e.g. “Last year, I was living on the other side of the globe.”
Underspecification: compare e.g. “Clean the window” (What do you clean?) and ”Paint the window” (What do you paint?)
Metaphors, e.g. “You are the cream in my coffee” – But what if you know that I don’t like cream?

“Lehramt” students will be especially interested in our applied linguistics courses. Study areas include theories of second language acquisition, learning & teaching English with pedagogic corpora and eLearning technologies, bilingual education (CLIL), English as a lingua franca, intercultural communication, and translation.

Some example topics of applied linguistics:
How do we acquire a second language? – From imitation to creation
What is the difference between first and second language acquisition? And how does language impairment fit in?
What are conditions for successful second language learning? – E.g. autonomy, authenticity, collaboration

**Part 3: What does analyzing and interpreting literature at the university mean?**

Analyzing and interpreting literature at the university is much more than reading a book and then saying what you think about it, or if you liked it. Literary studies are a wide and highly developed field with a long history of trying to come up with viable and meaningful ways of studying literature. Literature is integrated into a larger field of cultural artefacts, each of which can tell us something about the way a historical period or today’s world works. By ‘how something works’ we don’t mean just looking at institutions or understanding historical dates; we mean, for example, how a society is structured around power, beliefs, gender, material conditions and practices and how literature represents and renegotiates these structures.

Studying literature is not only about understanding social contexts, though. Another way of thinking about literature is as writing that pays particular attention to the form of language. That’s how we can differentiate a newspaper article from a novel, for example. We want you to develop an eye for that form and how form and content are interrelated.
Finally, literary studies are a scholarly discipline. This means that we try to do all of the above systematically and with a set of tools developed just for the purpose. Therefore, you cannot just assume or blurt out what you think a text might mean. You need to first analyze it carefully and then identify its structure, formal qualities and genre and learn about the social context. Only then can you try to make an argument and try to make it in a way which is plausible and traceable.

**Part 4: What would you do in a cultural studies class?**

You might have been surprised by seeing classes offered on cartoons, movies and pop songs when going over the courses offered at our department. These classes are part of the cultural studies section of our program.

Cultural studies began with the idea that not only certain types of literature and art are valuable for grasping the ways in which societies produce meaning, reproduce existing structures and formalize this in different types of writing or genres. Therefore we have expanded our field to include all kinds of cultural production in the last few years and are now examining Hollywood blockbusters or Blogs with many of the same tools we use for literary texts. Today in literature classes we study cultural contexts in order to understand (literary) texts; in cultural studies classes we use texts (and other productions) in order to understand culture.

Studying these popular phenomena is part of a bigger attempt at helping you to think critically about the world you live in and ask the right questions about all the things surrounding you.

We hope that you are more informed now both about the program itself and the types of courses you will take.