

## **Andrea Larson: On Excellent Teaching**

*Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?*

I am Andrea Larson, and I grew up in Murnau, close to Garmisch-Partenkirchen in southern Bavaria. I first came to the US as an international student at UNC, which is where I got my BA in Economics. I've since worked as narrative non-fiction writer and have published three books in German. After being invited as a guest lecturer first at Duke and then at UNC While pursuing an MA, I ultimately decided to apply to the Carolina-Duke Ph.D. program. I have been in the program since 2018, and I really love the people, its casual climate, the intellectual setting, and the diversity among faculty interests. In my spare time, I enjoy running, swimming, yoga, and occasionally horseback riding. I have a dog, two cats, as well as one chicken named Henrietta. I also enjoy gardening, but I am terrible at it.

*What is the trajectory of your teaching life so far?*

I have been teaching since Fall 2016. I have taught every course in the language program at UNC and Duke except for GERM 306. I have also taught the translation course (German for Reading Purpose) and TA-ed for Dr. Jakob Norberg. I am currently teaching German 340S: "Contemporary Culture through the German Media Landscape."

*Which course did you teach last semester?*

I taught German 305, which is the second to last advanced German class in the language sequence. Because I am also a certified Goethe Institute language tester for levels A2-C2—and thanks to a grant I was awarded by Duke Global—I was able to turn the class into a Goethe preparation course at the B2 level. What's more, I was able to invite guests (a politician, student, even a beekeeper) to zoom live into our classroom from Germany and discuss current issues with the students.

*What does a typical day in your classroom look like?*

I usually have a casual warm-up at the beginning of class chatting with students to check in with them and see how things are going. A typical class always involves discussion questions in order to facilitate an environment of comprehension, interpretation, and reflection. I will then expand the discussion through authentic materials such as text, video, and podcasts. I strive to accommodate all language learning modalities and preferences, and my lessons therefore build on a variety of multi-dimensional and -medial methods. Lately, I've even been incorporating QR codes in my classroom to keep it modern and have students access information quickly.

*What have been the most rewarding experiences for you as an instructor?*

For one, I really love being able to introduce students who have never been abroad to a foreign culture and also enjoy helping students go to German-speaking Europe, e.g., getting a passport, securing a visa, coordinating internships, writing recommendation letters. As a first-generation student myself, I moreover deeply value supporting people from less privileged backgrounds.

*Who have been your teaching influences?*

Dr. Tin Wegel, the Resident Director for the Duke in Berlin Program has taught me to allow students time to formulate their thoughts in the foreign language while keeping the learning environment engaging; I admire Dr. April Henry, the Language Program Coordinator at Duke, for her energy and excitement in the classroom; and Dr. Christina Weiler, the Language Program Coordinator at UNC, from whom I learned structural organization and precision in lesson planning.

*What are your master tips for teaching newcomers?*

You can't copy somebody! You have to go your own way. Learn useful and effective methods and techniques from others but you have to be you! Students are open to various teaching styles, and I think being authentic and excited about what you teach is most important.