

Despite a roughly \$100,000 increase in the school budget at Hume-Fogg, there are apparently not enough funds for the continuation of the school's illustrious German program. This program is both one of the most successful and one of the most useful disciplines at the school. The AP level class has, over its more than half a decade lifespan, maintained a perfect pass rate on the AP German Language and Culture exam. Not a single person has yet failed to pass. On the other hand, AP Research has yet to break above its 0% pass rate. Now, hopefully that changes (particularly because I took that exam and would like my money back), but the fact remains that the course with the best track record is the one being cut. Additionally, the benefits of offering instruction in German are numerous. First, by studying the language and participating in the National Association of German Teachers' National German Exam, students have the possibility to win not only accolades for their proficiency in the language, but a full-ride study abroad trip to Germany, courtesy of the German Bundestag (their parliament). To the best of my knowledge, no other language program provides this level of opportunity when it comes to cultural immersion. Furthermore, the credit for an AP German test can be applied to many universities. I have been unable to find statistics on just what percentage, however, just from eyeballing it, I can identify a number of classes that are accepted on a less frequent basis. Even while being very conservative in my estimates, I come up with six Advanced Placement programs that are, and will continue to be, taught at Hume-Fogg but are less likely to grant students credit for specific college courses: AP Seminar, AP Research, AP Spanish Literature, AP Physics 1, AP Human Geography, and AP English Language.

Additionally, I feel that it should be stated that one of the major companies operating in Tennessee is Volkswagen, which is obviously a German company. Now, while I highly doubt knowledge of German is a requirement for employment in any positions, the idea that a basic understanding of German culture, which includes their economy, could be very beneficial in working for them. Beyond that, German has immense potential to supplement additional courses of study. The Germans have been a heavyweight in modern history, from the Prussians to the North German Confederation to the German Empire to Nazi Germany. And before that, there were Germanic countries like Bavaria and the Hansa that wielded huge influence in European geopolitics. And that isn't even counting Switzerland and Austria, which both speak German, and their impact on European history. On top of that, German migration to the United States played an important part in the settlement of several parts of the country, for instance, Minnesota. Perhaps most important, is that education in German culture renders viewpoints that do not fit with the traditional American version of viewpoints accessible. The greatest example of this is likely the Treaty of Versailles. The Germans were taken to town, despite the fact that they had not started the First World War and that the people had overthrown the government that had fought in it, creating the Weimar Republic. The period between the world wars and World War II itself take on a vastly different context when one considers the economic abuse inflicted on the German people by the Allies. It makes the rise of Hitler, not permissible, but understandable. And that is, really, a major goal of history classes. To allow students to see things from a variety of perspectives and understand where the various parties were coming from. German is also useful in English instruction because of the close relationship the two tongues have with one another. German is English's closest relative. Until about a thousand years ago, the two languages were contained within the same dialect continuum, all the way until Middle English. And here is another interesting historical point. The reason for the divergence was French influence from the Norman Conquerors. But an understanding of German is beneficial to the fostering of a greater understanding of the origins of grammatical rules and customs found within the English language. And

beyond that, knowledge of German can be immensely helpful in the study of literature. This is the language of Kafka and of Goethe.

According to someone close to the budget process, who has requested anonymity, the school budget for Hume-Fogg will actually increase next year from just under \$4.1 million to just over \$4.2 million. The total increase comes out to \$110,491. According to the MNPS pay scale, we can estimate that the current teacher for the German program would be earning just about \$60,000. In fact, the school could keep this program and still have nearly \$50,000 left to spend. Dr. Hargis has chosen to cut the German department in order to add a new French teacher and increase the work-year for the school's two vice principals. However, I would contend that this is not the ideal allocation of the school's funds. But either way, there is a way for Dr. Hargis to get those requests completed while maintaining the German program. As noted, there is still a discretionary fund of roughly \$49,000 from the budget increase. The highest base pay for an assistant vice principal at a high school is around \$120,000 as a twelve month employee. That means close to \$10,000 a month. If we assume that currently Dr. Bonelli and Mr. Harned are currently ten month employees, then that would mean switching them to twelve month employees incurs a total of about \$40,000. We still have \$9,000 left to work with. Now, that is not even close to what it would take to pay for an additional French teacher. However, Hume-Fogg has an extra campus supervisor. While the support pay scale is more difficult to read, the two people holding this position earn at least \$22,000 a year each. We do not need two people to do this job. Most of what they do is basic supervision, and we do not have a major discipline problem. Now we're up to \$31,000, being very conservative in cost estimates. We also could make do with a part time secretary rather than a full time one. We could have 3.5 office employees. Martin Luther King Magnet has 4.5 for a school population more than 300 (or roughly 33%) larger than Hume-Fogg. These employees also earn a bare minimum of \$22,000, meaning cutting back to half time frees up another \$10,000ish to work with. At this point, we have \$41,000 to work with. This is within \$1500 of the baseline salary for a teacher. Now while we are still under the amount, it is very probable that I significantly underestimated the salaries of those in support positions, meaning that there is likely enough money to work with to hire a French teacher at this point already. However, even if I'm wrong, we have several options to make up the difference. We could further reduce the number of secretaries to 3. Alternatively, we could decrease the number of counselors (we have an extra one). Or, beyond those options, funding could merely be reduced in several places slightly. Cutting German is not the only or, I believe, the best use of the school's resources, merely the easiest.

In an email to the students in the German program, as well as their families, Dr. Hargis stresses that "the needs of our students were taken into consideration throughout this...decision making process". While I cannot speak to whether this is true, I can say that even if student "needs" were taken into account, student wishes most certainly were not. Dr. Hargis and the administration did not discuss the plan with a single student. This past Friday, I requested that she meet with a handful of students in the German program. As of yet, she has not responded to that email. For someone who idolizes Hume-Fogg's "great tradition of excellence" being "built on a culture of collaboration and cooperation", it seems very strange to not collaborate or cooperate with the student body, any delegation thereof, or faculty in making the decision to completely abolish one of the school's highest performing programs.

The German instructor was only informed of the decision after the fact and not in the process of making it. Rather than continue investment in offering the best depth and breadth possible in terms of courses, Dr. Hargis has decided to disproportionately invest in administrative positions. I would like to take this opportunity to point out the school's mission statement: "To engage, equip, and empower the academically talented and culturally diverse students we serve". Engage, equip, and empower. Now, how exactly does an extra campus supervisor or secretary equip anyone? Empower? Engage, maybe if they're a good conversationalist. But that mission is carried out by teachers, not support staff. Also, for someone so interested in cultural diversity, it seems odd for this to be the second world language program to be done away with under Dr. Hargis's administration. Hume-Fogg offered Chinese until around three years ago, but was done away with because of low enrollment. But to have gone from offering 5 languages to only 3 in just 4 years is almost impressive. That is a 40% drop. Additionally, the idea of the administration encouraging "continued study in foreign language and culture" would seem slightly less ridiculous if they hadn't overseen the number of programs of instruction in these disciplines being nearly halved. No matter how "proud" Hargis is "to provide opportunities in Latin, Spanish, and French," it does not change the fact she seems to only be proud of it insofar as it aligns itself with her decisions. As I explained in depth earlier, German is not being cut for budgetary reasons. The money is there. But rather than engage, equip, and empower the students at HFA with dedicated, experienced faculty, she would like to beef up support staff. Perhaps Dr. Hargis should consider a revision in the mission statement; to "administrate and supervise the academically gifted students we serve to empower them, so long as they aren't empowered when it comes to dealing with us" would seem to more accurately reflect her outlook on the school's role in the lives of students. I would also urge Dr. Hargis to remember that we "are watching and learning from us" and so the administration ought to "make sure we model our best selves for them". What is being modeled, it seems to me, is that education being cross-disciplinary is not very important and that when in positions of power, one should make high stakes decisions without gathering any input from the primary people being affected by said decision. What I'm learning is that campus supervisors are more important than teachers. What I'm learning is that I should leave it up to the people in charge to consider my needs. What I'm learning is that discourse is an arena of administrators only. Who else could possibly speak to the needs of students?

What bothers me most about this situation is that Frau Bush is basically the physical manifestation of the school mantra. If there is a single teacher engaging, equipping, and empowering their pupils, it's her. I have heard people say mean things and that they don't like her. But I have never heard a single person ever even begin to imply that she is anything short of an absolutely excellent teacher. She gives good, usable feedback, keeps clear schedules, gives students personal attention when needed, and clearly loves doing it. Hume-Fogg is full of good teachers. But there aren't too many great ones. Why get rid of one? No students were consulted in making this decision. As far as I can gather, neither were the foreign language faculty. Why should they get a say in switching faculty distribution? Hargis gave virtually no notice. She only informed the faculty a few days before the deadline to change the budget. Again, what I'm learning is that unilateralism is the best modus operandi. There are a lot of students who are very passionate about German. Because they are not just being taught. They're being engaged. They're being equipped. They're being empowered. Above all else, they're being inspired. The

zeal that exists with a lot of students in German is unparalleled. But then again I suppose the campus being supervised and the office being heavily staffed is more important than silly little things. The money is there. The instruction is there. The zest for learning is there. The teacher is there. The students are there. So here is my question for Dr. Hargis : where are you? Why was this decision made behind closed doors? Why are administrators more important than teachers? But most of all, what happened to “We should be slow to speak and quick to listen”? Remind me, when was it that you took the time to listen to us? Dr. Hargis claims that she wants every student to be imbued with “a love of learning”. That’s a little difficult when the learning they love is taken from them in the flash of an eye without any fair warning.