Becoming fluent in a language requires much more than mastering grammar and vocabulary, says long-time language teacher and scholar Dr. Kim Misfeldt. Rather than struggling to translate English thoughts into German, a truly fluent student finds a way to communicate using the cultural ideas the language embodies.

“It’s a wonderful thing to be able to see the moment that the doors open for students,” says Misfeldt, who was awarded a 3M National Teaching Fellowship earlier this year. “When they’re able to reach that spot where they are thinking in German and they’re not translating every sentence. And they’re saying things in German that they can’t easily translate into English.”

There are, after all, plenty of things that can’t be directly translated. The English word ‘cougar’ (meaning an older woman with an affinity for younger men, not the predatory cat) has no German translation. Likewise, there is a German ailment without an English equivalent (the closest phrase might be ‘circulatory collapse’). “We learn so much about ourselves and our culture by the words we have,” says Misfeldt. Acquiring a new language gives students insights into other cultures, as well as themselves. That’s because language is fundamentally a vehicle for expressing our thoughts and feelings. “Language is a very personal thing,” says Misfeldt. To that end, she encourages her students to speak about their hobbies and interests in German, whenever possible. “If you’re not learning vocabulary and being able to talk about things of interest to you, then what’s the point?”

In a German language class, Misfeldt asked her students to pick media articles of personal relevance and speak about them in German. In a German literature class she teaches, students designed their own projects around the German short story, which they were studying at the time. One student wrote a dramatic scene about a WWII soldier; another created a PowerPoint presentation juxtaposing the words of a famous German activist killed by Hitler against images of modern social justice issues. Everyone went above and beyond. “Each of the students did what they wanted to do and spent more time and energy than what the 5% called for,” she says.

Misfeldt strongly believes in encouraging students to take control of their own learning process, but it’s a mutually beneficial scenario: “What makes teaching at a university exciting is the interaction with students. How they learn from each other and the energy we create together in that time and space. I don’t ever just stand up and lecture.”

That’s not to say that Misfeldt takes a laissez-faire approach to teaching – quite the contrary. From the very beginning of her career, she’s consistently honed her teaching skills. Not long after finishing her PhD in German literature, she took an educational leave from the U of A to complete a master’s degree in second-language teaching in Germany. Recently, she went to Mexico to learn Spanish and remind herself of what it’s like to be a new language learner. She consistently takes courses to bolster her understanding and gain new tools.

Misfeldt’s students at both the U of A’s Augustana campus, and the Canadian Summer School in Germany (a national immersion program for university students that she currently heads), benefit from this. “Some say teaching is a gift, but I believe it’s a craft,” she says. “Good teaching comes from study, and watching and learning.”
UPCOMING DEADLINES FOR ACADEMIC AWARDS

McCalla Professorship
McCalla Professors are those who value excellence in teaching, acknowledge the importance of students, conduct themselves in an ethical manner, are collaborative, open to change, take pride in history and traditions and are committed to integrating their research and teaching.

Large Faculties determine individual submission deadlines; therefore, please check Faculty websites for more information. Recommendations from large faculties are to be submitted to the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) no later than January 31, 2014.

Submissions from small Faculties should be sent each year to the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) on December 2, 2013.

An information session for the McCalla Professorship will be held on Tuesday, November 5, 2013 from 2 – 4 pm in 2-31 SAB.

Alan Blizzard Award
The Alan Blizzard Award was developed by the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) to highlight excellence in collaborative university teaching and learning.

The Alan Blizzard award seeks to foster recognition, visibility, and appreciation for effective collaboration in university teaching and learning. The deadline to submit applications to STLHE for the Alan Blizzard Award is TBA (usually February 15). More information is available at www.stthe.ca/awards/alban-blizzard-award

Desire2Learn Innovation Award
The Desire2Learn Innovation Award in Teaching and Learning recognizes innovative approaches that promote learning in new ways at post-secondary institutions.

This award is open to all instructors currently teaching at a post-secondary institution, regardless of discipline, level, or term of appointment. The deadline for this award is TBA (usually January 13). Please refer to www.stthe.ca/awards/desire2learn-innovation-award for further details.

Awards for Teaching Excellence
The deadline to submit nominations for the following awards is Friday, February 28, 2014.

Award for Excellence in Graduate Teaching
Any individual who teaches graduate students as a full-time continuing member of the academic teaching staff is eligible. Nominees must have taught graduate students within the last 24 months of the date of nomination to be eligible for this award.

Provost’s Award for Early Achievement of Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching
Any individual who has completed no more than five years of University teaching as a full-time continuing member of the academic teaching staff is eligible to be nominated for the award.

Rutherford Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching
Any individual who has completed at least 18 credits at the University of Alberta as a full-time continuing member of the academic teaching staff is eligible to be nominated.

Teaching Unit Award
The Teaching Unit Award recognizes teaching excellence that occurs when two or more academic staff members collaborate to provide leadership in the preparation and coordination of instruction at the undergraduate or graduate level and who are actively involved in the delivery of instruction. Collaboration may occur within, between or among members of a faculty, school, department or division and may include additional team members.

The award will be given alternately to either a coordinated ‘team teaching’ course over a two year period. This year, coordinated courses (i.e. course comprised of several sections) are eligible for the Teaching Unit Award. Next year, team teaching (i.e. a course involving collaboration between two or more instructors) will be eligible.

William Hardy Alexander Award
Temporary academic as well as continuing academic staff (Administrative Professional Officers, Faculty Service Officers, Librarians, part-time continuing academic staff and Trust staff) with at least three years teaching experience (and who have taught at least 18 credits) at the University of Alberta are eligible to be nominated.

For more information...
Visit ualberta.ca/academicawards, use the search tool or navigate to the award you are interested in. For discipline specific awards, select the appropriate field of study and determine which award(s) are applicable.

NEED HELP WITH AN ACADEMIC AWARD NOMINATION?
The Faculty Awards Facilitator supports academics in their pursuit of teaching awards. This service is offered through the Policy and Governance Unit in the Office of the Registrar. For more information or assistance with a teaching award nomination, please contact Bobbi Schiestel, Faculty Awards Facilitator, at 780.402.1952 or via email at bobbi.schiestel@ualberta.ca.