

"We're not surprised at all (by a C minus grade). That's pretty much the point of the Year of Languages."

Thomas Sauer

president-elect of the Kentucky World Language Association and organizer of the language ambush



BRIAN TIETZ

Thomas Sauer, left, president-elect of the Kentucky World Language Association, explained the language ambush to UK students and professors yesterday. UK German professor Jeff Rogers, right, participated.

Say what? Lexington grades C minus in language ambush

FOREIGN-LANGUAGE SPEAKERS ASK QUESTIONS, BUT FEW ANSWER

By Andy Mead

HERALD-LEADER STAFF WRITER

Shortly after noon yesterday, a smiling Christina Wegel approached two men on a sun-drenched street corner in downtown Lexington.

"Können Sie mir bitte sagen, wieviel Uhr es ist?" she asked.

"No thank you," one of them said.

She approached two women.

"Können Sie mir bitte sagen, wieviel Uhr es ist?"

"We're getting ready to go to lunch," one said.

Wegel wasn't trying to sell anything or to come between anyone and their lunch.

She is a German instructor at the University of Kentucky and was asking, "Could you tell me what

time it is, please?" in German as part of something called a language ambush.

A dozen other smiling people were standing on other street corners asking the same question in French, Spanish, Russian and Romanian.

The idea: To test Lexington's ability to compete in a global marketplace and to bring attention to The Year of Languages, an effort of the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages to raise awareness of the issue.

The results: Not good. A C minus.

Of 237 people asked the question, 118 did not respond at all. Another 114 responded "politely, in English, sometimes with compre-

hension."

Only 14 answered accurately in the language in which the question was asked.

The Spanish time-seekers got the most responses. The Russian and Romanian questioners got none.

Thomas Sauer, president-elect of the Kentucky World Language Association, said the ambush succeeded in bringing attention to the dearth of languages prowess.

And what about that C minus?

"We're not surprised at all," said Sauer. "That's pretty much the point of the Year of Languages."

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