

Distance Education During a Paper Shortage

Wartime Economics, Efficiency, and the Nazi Humanities at the Front

▼ ONLINE FIRST ARTICLE

▼ **ABSTRACT** This article examines letters and study guides sent by philosophical faculties of Nazi universities to soldiers enrolled in correspondence courses during World War II. These educational media were produced during a severe paper shortage brought about by autarky and the wartime Nazi economy. I consider the conditions surrounding paper production and soldiers' learning materials to depict how the media circulating between universities and the front demonstrate evidence of material scarcity and economic exploitation. The brevity of the messages indicates that these media had been adapted to the material economy of the war and a scarcity of time. As I show, knowledge of the humanities was brought to the front via these media; at the same time, knowledge of an ideology was created that integrates the extraction of resources from a war of conquest into a version of German history—resources that were also required to maintain distance learning itself. The article contributes most directly to studies on the media and material practices of academic teaching and to the history of science and scholarship in the Nazi era. It also builds on recent studies on how the work of the sciences and humanities are reliant on supplies of natural resources.

▼ **KEYWORDS** educational media; resources of knowledge; history of humanities; correspondence course

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BREPOLS

In 1943, the journal of the National Socialist German Students' League published a picture of students preparing the distribution of the *Feldpostbrief des Reichsstudentenführers* (Field Post Letter of the Chairman of the Student Services Organization). In this "snapshot," as the caption calls it, one young woman and four young men with side parts, the distinctive hairstyle of the Hitler Youth, are bent over stacks of paper ready to be shipped to war zones [Fig. 1].

This field post letter was part of a comprehensive distance learning program for Wehrmacht soldiers, which universities and technical colleges (*Technische Hochschulen*) throughout Nazi Germany implemented between 1942 and 1945. Its declared aim was to give the soldiers a rudimentary sense of their studies in order to ease their return to (or arrival at) university once the war was over. As the aforementioned copies of letters being sorted, folded, and stacked make evident, the program relied heavily on the circulation of paper teaching materials. This may seem obvious, yet it was much less self-evident in the economic context of the ongoing war. Because of the regime's autarky and wartime economy, paper was extremely scarce in Nazi Germany, even before the start of the war. Thus, correspondence coursework was more than just a difficult task in terms of staffing and developing suitable pedagogy. Letters, books, and study guides that circulated between universities and war zones were also produced under substantial material and logistical constraints, making the academic supervision of students in combat largely a matter of paper. At the start of this paper-intensive program, students of the humanities were prioritized, but the humanities were also subject to the assumption that they could manage without much material supply.

This article explores why the humanities were given such an important role in Nazi distance education—a program that justified the circulation of knowledge via paper in wartime and utilized the corresponding resource economy. Focusing on letters and study guides circulated by philosophical faculties (*Philosophische Fakultäten*, the division of the university responsible for the humanities), I aim to show that the media sent out by faculties despite economic constraints reveal the entanglements of the humanities with Nazi academic ideology, wartime economics, autarky, and the demands for efficiency during World War II: knowledge of the humanities was brought to the front, while knowledge of an ideology was created that integrated the extraction of resources during a war of conquest—ultimately required for distance learning itself—into a purported German national history.

In doing so, this article connects to several research fields. A key point of departure is the observation that the media and material practices of academic teaching are a crucial part of institutional knowledge production.¹ Building on recent studies that concentrate on educational media in the sciences, I focus

¹ See Clark, *Academic Charisma*.

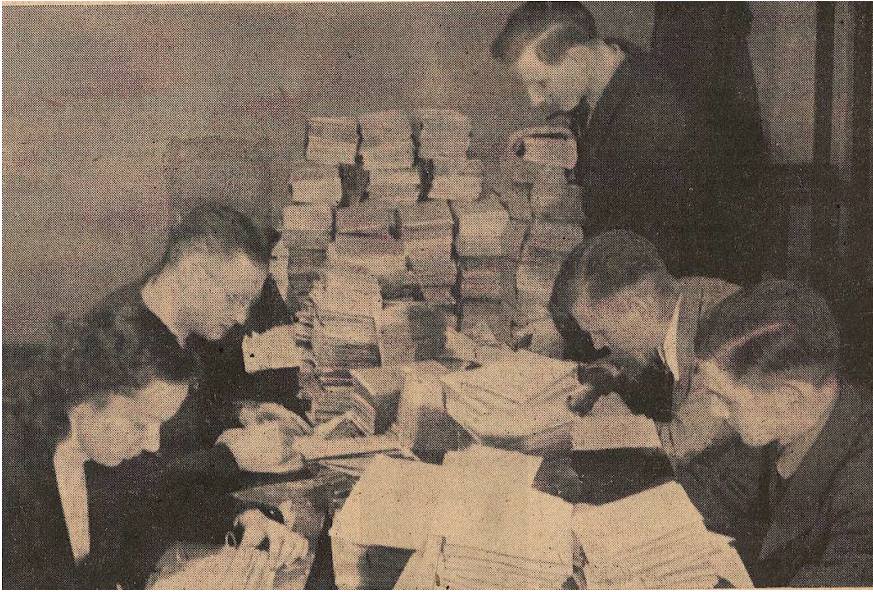


Figure 1. Students sending the *Feldpostbrief des Reichsstudentenführers*. The caption also mentions that numerous “comrades”—both male and female—participated in sending out the letter [“Viele Kameradinnen und Kameraden helfen mit, den Brief in die Hände seiner Leser zu bringen”], thus emphasizing the great solidarity between the Nazi student body and the studying soldiers, the recipients of the letters. “Bilder des Monats,” *Die Bewegung* 11, no. 10 (1943): 9. © Heidelberger historische Bestände digital – https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/bewegung_muenchen (10.03.2024).

on the highly ideological educational media of the Nazi humanities.² In this way, I engage with research on the topic of war and education, factors that are closely interrelated in various respects, especially in the twentieth century.³ In addition, I build on the literature on science, scholarship during the Nazi era in particular, and distance education.⁴ With this approach to the materiality of educational media, taking into account the circumstances of paper production, I furthermore connect to recent research on how the sciences and humanities depend on the supply of natural resources and are thus implicated in ecological and economic exploitation.⁵

In this interdisciplinary context of the history of the humanities and sciences, the history of teaching media and higher education, and the economic

² On educational media in the sciences, see Creager, Grote, and Leong, “Learning by the Book”; Kaiser, *Pedagogy and the Practice*.

³ Engelmann, Hemetsberger, and Jacob, “War and Education,” 2. For a recent publication on this topic, see the corresponding edited volume, Engelmann, Hemetsberger, and Jacob, *War and Education*.

⁴ For more recent studies on scholarship during the Nazi era, see Levinson and Ericksen, *The Betrayal*; Bialas and Rabinbach, *Nazi Germany*. On distance education, see Dieckmann and Zinn, *Geschichte des Fernunterrichts*; Hunt, “A History”; Lee, “Technopedagogies of Mass-Individualization.”

⁵ Tkaczyk and Oertzen, *Supplied Knowledge*.

history of materials, my focus on the economy of Nazi correspondence coursework in the humanities offers new, critical insights into the history of the humanities. As I show, the Nazi humanities did not simply “betray” the humanities and their humanistic ideals because scholars and academics supported a criminal regime.⁶ The humanities, which were considered to be materially modest, proved to be heavily involved in the surrounding economic and political processes through their acquisition and circulation of paper. At the same time, they supported a war of conquest through the ideologies disseminated by distance education.

The case of Nazi correspondence coursework sheds light on an episode that has to date received little attention; existing studies either provide brief overviews or focus on individual universities or disciplines.⁷ By contrast, I examine letters from various philosophical faculties in Nazi Germany and documents on the academic organizational structure that have survived in university archives and collections. The material collected in Heidelberg, Munich, Vienna, Jena, and Berlin does not offer a comprehensive body of texts but rather represents an excerpt from source material that is difficult to access due to its wide circulation and wide lacunae.

To understand these teaching materials in terms of research policy and economics, this article is structured according to the following questions: (1) How was Nazi distance education organized, and what role did paper media play? (2) How did the Nazi state’s autarky and wartime economy of paper function? (3) To what extent do the teaching materials in the humanities bear witness to this exploitative economy, which goals did they pursue, and what strategies did they devise to deal with the paper shortage? While the letters and study guides themselves are the focus of the third section, the analyses in the first two sections function more as overviews based on archival and printed sources but also draw from the literature mentioned above.

The Circulation of Paper for Nazi Correspondence Coursework

Nazi correspondence coursework started in early 1942, shortly after a decree by the Reich Ministry of Science, Education, and Culture that ordered universities to “immediately begin” the supervision of Wehrmacht students in the air

⁶ This was recently discussed in Levinson and Ericksen, *The Betrayal*.

⁷ Grüttner, *Studenten im Dritten Reich*, 367–69; Krönig and Müller, *Nachkriegs-Semester*, 28–30; Raith, “Die Feldpostbriefe der Fakultäten”; Böttner, “Pflichterfüllung an der ‘Inneren Front,’” 279–80; Wlach, “Klassische Archäologie,” 364–65; Faulenbach, *Theologisches Fernstudium*; Take, *Forschen für den Wirtschaftskrieg*, 181–84; Lickleder, *Die Freiburger Forstwissenschaft*, 300–326.

force.⁸ At that point, studying via correspondence was an established practice. Correspondence coursework is defined by the “provision of materials or direct teaching and timely feedback on students’ submitted work” and accordingly relied on paper media in its early days.⁹ This form of education is intimately linked to the media and technologies of the time, as it would continue to be in later years.¹⁰ In Germany, the beginning of distance education can be dated back to the early nineteenth century with, for example, the *belehrende Briefe* (instructive letters) that disseminated information from various fields to broader swaths of society.¹¹ Distance education in the proper sense emerged in the late nineteenth century, with the first private schools for vocational training, further education, and preparation for school exit exams that operated through correspondence.¹²

The Nazi regime slowly restricted private distance education schools as part of the *Gleichschaltung* (coordination) of the education system.¹³ University teaching in all subjects was required to follow Nazi ideology, just like the rest of the system, starting with early education.¹⁴ Imparting knowledge was only secondary to shaping students’ minds. Teaching was regarded holistically rather than disciplinarily, and it was thoroughly political, with the concept of race taking center stage in research and teaching. This was accompanied by shifts in professorships for new academic chairs and institutes, whereby the fields of military science, pre- and early history, folklore studies, and “racial hygiene” were elevated in particular. However, there were no concrete guidelines for the organization of teaching, leaving it to teachers to ultimately determine how strongly ideology was to be followed.¹⁵

When the Nazis ordered distance education, most male students—who had dominated in lectures and seminars in the prewar period—were on combat duty. Their service was indispensable, and as such, a comprehensive academic education was not the goal of this mandated program. The primary aim was to give young soldiers a rudimentary sense of the content of their studies, thus accelerating their entry or re-entry into university after the war.¹⁶ After a considerable increase in the student population during the Weimar Republic, the number of students fell sharply in the 1930s due to demographic changes, economic uncertainties, the new appeal of non-academic professions, especially

8 [“unverzüglich zu beginnen”] Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung: “Betr. Weiterbildung der Jungakademiker,” 07.01.1942. BA, R 4901/12908, no. 2. All dates are written in DD.MM.YYYY format.

9 Hunt, “A History,” 346.

10 Lee, “Technopedagogies of Mass-Individualization.”

11 Dieckmann and Zinn, *Geschichte des Fernunterrichts*, 22–23.

12 *Ibid.*, 31–42.

13 *Ibid.*, 61–65.

14 See Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany*.

15 See Grüttner, *Studenten im Dritten Reich*, 155–205.

16 *Ibid.*, 361–69.

in the Wehrmacht, and the anti-academic policy of the regime.¹⁷ The regime thus faced a long-term shortage of university-educated workers. Accordingly, distance learning was intended to counteract the “complete dulling” of the next generation and to secure the nation’s intellectual resources for future fields of work beyond the Wehrmacht.¹⁸ In other words, the goal of this program was to keep the minds of soldiers somewhat sharp for “normal” life after the war, while also exposing them to propaganda.¹⁹

The decree from early 1942 assigned the organization of correspondence coursework to the universities. All universities and technical colleges were to appoint a coordinator who would communicate with the participating departments. Correspondence courses were to be as personal as possible. Every registered air force soldier was to be contacted, and mass-produced circulars were initially prohibited.²⁰ Instead, individualized materials and methods were to be developed, each adapted to the course of study and the student.²¹ Since correspondence coursework was an air force initiative, only its soldiers benefited in the first year. It was not until the following year that members of the army and navy were also able to register.²² Separate correspondence courses were arranged for German students in prisoner-of-war camps; instead of the Wehrmacht, the German Red Cross took over the organization in cooperation with the Reichsstudentenwerk (Student Services Organization).²³

The expansion of the correspondence program to the entire Wehrmacht greatly increased the number of students, meaning that the previous individualized system could no longer keep up. In response, a veritable Nazi front university, based on standardized lesson plans and media, was launched in 1943: the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (High Command of the Wehrmacht), the Reich Ministry of Science, Education, and Culture, the chairman of the Reichsstudentenwerk, and selected university professors began publishing uniform study guides on a wide range of subjects. Divided into introductory volumes and more advanced specialized volumes, these were intended to

17 *Ibid.*, 101–9.

18 [“völlige Abstumpfung”] Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung, “Betr. Weiterbildung der Jungakademiker,” 07.01.1942, Vermerk [1]. BA, R 4901/12908, no. 4.

19 Correspondence education was not unique to Nazi Germany during World War II, although the programs had different ideological aims. University study programs by letter were, for example, also offered to the Australian and British armies. Dymock, “Learning in the Trenches”; Hunt, “A History,” 348.

20 Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung, “Betr. Weiterbildung der Jungakademiker,” 07.01.1942, Vermerk [1]. BA, R 4901/12908, no. 4.

21 Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung, “Betr. Weiterbildung der Jungakademiker,” 07.01.1942, Vermerk [2]. BA, R 4901/12908, no. 3.

22 Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung, “Betrifft: Betreuung der im Wehrdienst stehenden Studenten,” 01.06.1943. BA, R 4901/12908, no. 29; Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung, “Betrifft: Studienbetreuung der im Wehrdienst stehenden Studenten,” 23.07.1943. BA, R 4901/12908, no. 50–51.

23 Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung, “Betrifft: Weiterbildung von deutschen Kriegsgefangenen und Zivilinternierten im Britischen Reich und den USA,” 12.11.1943. BA, R 1409/12908, no. 78–79.

constitute a veritable library of Nazi educational offerings, in line, of course, with the required academic ideology of the regime. This series had been planned before the war and was finally realized, with the introductory volumes appearing simultaneously, in these new circumstances, under the title *Soldatenbriefe für Studenten* (Soldier Letters for Students).²⁴ All study guides were available through the book trade at the front (*Frontbuchhandel*), thus linking correspondence coursework to an existing wartime infrastructure and compensating for any difficulties the universities might have in obtaining and shipping paper.²⁵ Since textbooks had also become scarce due to the paper shortage, the Reichsstudentenwerk launched a campaign to collect unused textbooks and reference works for fighting and injured soldiers.²⁶

As had been done the previous year for air force students,²⁷ introductory courses on various subjects were offered at universities in Nazi Germany and in the war zones to supplement the correspondence courses; soldiers were assigned to these courses for a short period of time.²⁸ However, the centrally organized study guides and block courses were still intended to complement individual supervision by the universities. Distance learning was further centralized at the beginning of 1944 with the establishment of a “soldiers’ office of the Reichsstudentenwerk” (*Soldatendienst des Reichsstudentenführers*), which was henceforth to coordinate the courses, *Soldatenbriefe*, and supervision offered by the universities.²⁹ This included the regularly sent *Feldpostbrief des Reichsstudentenführers* mentioned above, containing messages from Gustav Adolf Scheel, signaling to the soldiers that they shared an affiliation with a student body.³⁰

In all phases, correspondence courses were largely based on paper teaching materials. Letters between soldiers and university teachers, circulars from faculties or institutes, the *Soldatenbriefe für Studenten*, the *Feldpostbriefe des Reichsstudentenführers*, as well as textbooks and reference works formed the basis of these materials. On-site courses were merely occasional supplements to remote learning and teaching on paper. Circulated, transported from the

24 Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund, “Betrifft: ‘Studienführer’ und ‘Soldatenbriefe für Studenten,’” 22.09.1943. UA Berlin, RS.01, 0247, no. 162. The *Soldatenbriefe für Studenten* were to be published as a supplement to the series *Soldatenbriefe zur Berufsförderung* (soldiers’ letters for career advancement), which the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht had begun to publish in 1940. Like the *Soldatenbriefe zur Berufsförderung*, they were to be published by Ferdinand Hirt, while the other study guides were published by the Universitätsverlag Winter.

25 Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund, “Betrifft: ‘Studienführer’ und ‘Soldatenbriefe für Studenten,’” 22.09.1943. UA Berlin, RS.01, 0247, no. 162, pp. 2, 4.

26 “Beschaffung von Lehrbüchern.”

27 Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung, [no subject line], 05.03.1942. BA, R 4901/14466, no. 132.

28 Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung, “Betrifft: Betreuung der im Wehrdienst stehenden Studenten,” 01.06.1943. BA, R 4901/12908, no. 29.

29 “Soldatendienst des Reichsstudentenführers.”

30 Gustav Adolf Scheel, *Feldpostbrief des Reichsstudentenführers* 1, 01.05.1943. UA Jena, BA 2145, no. 179–82.

ministries and universities to the front, and partly returned to Nazi Germany, this paper was sent through the field post and the Luftwaffe.³¹ The soldiers thus studied by airmail.

But paper was scarce from the very beginning. Immediately after the first decree on correspondence coursework, universities reported “considerable difficulties” in obtaining paper. The Ministry of Science offered to share paper, but with the caveat: “Requirements are to be kept as low as possible.”³² The air force also provided paper to produce printed matter, and after correspondence coursework was extended to the entire Wehrmacht, additional paper could be obtained from the Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda (Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda).³³ However, the demand for paper remained a challenge due to the general economic situation in Nazi Germany.

The Wartime Economy of Paper

The New Plan of 1934 and the Four-Year Plan of 1936 aimed to make Germany’s economy independent from foreign trade and to prepare the country for the war. The regime sought to achieve this so-called “German freedom of raw materials” by regulating foreign trade, expanding domestic raw material production, developing synthetic substitutes, and recycling secondary materials (*Altstoffe*). However, autarky was only a temporary program, to be replaced by the exploitation of the regions the Nazis planned to conquer.³⁴

Although the Nazi autarky policy focused mainly on metals, oil, and rubber—materials necessary for the war industry—the paper industry was also heavily regulated. In the transformation of the economy into a hierarchical, uniform system of *Gleichschaltung*, the combination of a private and planned economy was reflected in the paper industry, which was one reason for the overall dysfunction of the system.³⁵ A series of decrees began with the establishment of a monitoring office for paper in 1934, which bore the name Reich Office for Paper and Packaging (Reichsstelle für Papier und Verpackungswesen) starting in 1939, and was tasked with the reorganization of paper-related industry

31 The Luftwaffe continued to be responsible for sending the teaching materials when correspondence courses were extended to all Wehrmacht soldiers. “Aktennotiz,” 07.04.1943. UA Berlin, RS.01, 0247, no. 4.

32 [“erhebliche Schwierigkeiten”; “Die Anforderungen sind so niedrig wie möglich zu halten.”] Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung, “Betrifft: Weiterbildung der Jungakademiker,” 05.05.1942. BA, R 4901/12908, no. 6.

33 Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung, “Betr. Fernbetreuung der Jungakademiker der Luftwaffe,” 27.07.1942, pp. 2–3. BA, R 4901/12908, no. 10–11; Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung, “Betrifft: Studienbetreuung der im Wehrdienst stehenden Studenten,” 23.07.1943. BA, R 4901/12908, no. 50–51.

34 See Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction*, 203–43; Schanetzky, “*Kanonen statt Butter*,” 84–97.

35 For a comprehensive account of paper production during the Nazi era, see Schmidt-Bachem, *Aus Papier*, 256–318.

groups within the consolidated economic system. In the “fight against paper waste” proclaimed by Fritz Löb, the head of the Office for German Raw and Basic Materials (Amt für deutsche Roh- und Werkstoffe), the paper and paper processing industry was urged to exercise stringent frugality: the consumption of raw and secondary materials was regulated through permits for purchasing cardboard, paper, pulp, groundwood pulp, recycled paper, and other materials. Paper was to be stringently saved, and only those grades whose quality was just good enough to serve a given purpose were to be used.³⁶

The regulations also affected the use of paper. For business correspondence, for example, there were paper-saving requirements that stipulated the use of certain types and maximum formats for writing paper, typewriter paper, carbon copy paper, and envelopes, among other things.³⁷ Slogans proliferated: “Keep letters short and concise,” “Write on letters in narrow lines and on both sides,” “Save space on greetings and signatures,” and “Collect wastepaper.”³⁸ The production of many everyday products classified as dispensable, such as guest books, bags for pretzel sticks, Easter grass, and film programs, were banned altogether.³⁹ Regulations for saving materials and collecting secondary materials such as these, which were implemented both in industry and in everyday life, were all part of the wider national mobilization toward a zero-waste circular economy in the service of the regime and its genocidal logic.⁴⁰

To ensure that paper products matched the supply of available German raw materials, pulp and groundwood production was to use mainly domestic wood species such as pine or beech. Straw was increasingly utilized, and used paper played an ever-greater role. In addition, experiments were carried out with alternative materials: xylitol, peat, flax, hemp, sawdust, and potato plants.⁴¹ Over the years, the Reich Office for Paper and Packaging issued numerous orders, regulations, and individual instructions that prescribed in great detail the material composition, form, color, and weight of products in all areas of paper production and processing. Thus, a large amount of paper was needed to issue these increasingly restrictive, small-bore regulations.

The paper industry was also directly involved in the Nazi regime of exploitation. This primarily concerned wood, as the German timber industry was previously dependent on imports, making wood one of the scarcest raw materials at the start of the autarkic economy. Under the doctrine of *Dauerwald* (perpetual forest), and with Hermann Göring as Reich master of forestry (Reichsforstmeister), a silvicultural policy was introduced in 1934

36 [“Kampf gegen die Papiervergeudung”] Löb, “Entwicklung und Ausbau,” 27.

37 Lilje, “Papiereinsparung.”

38 [“Briefe knapp und kurz fassen”; “Briefblätter engzeilig und auf beiden Seiten beschriften”; “Bei Grußform und Unterschrift Raum sparen”; “Altpapier sammeln”] Lilje, “Papiereinsparung,” 143.

39 “Anlage 7 zur Anordnung Nr. 2 der Reichsstelle für Papier und Verpackungswesen vom 31. Dezember 1941.”

40 Berg, “The Nazi Rag-Pickers.”

41 Köhler, “Holz und Stroh”; Neumann, “Ausweichstoffe”; Wend, “Altpapier.”

that replaced the existing silviculture oriented toward industrial use in pursuit of an ambivalent strategy, one that was certainly ecological and sustainable in today's sense but simultaneously created a highly racist rhetoric around the German forest.⁴² Yet, in an autarkic economy, exploitation of the forest became necessary, which contradicted these principles and dictated that all wood species and wood waste from the exalted German forest be processed to the fullest.⁴³

The Wehrmacht's initial conquests subsequently took the pressure off local forests and secured the wood supply for the German economy by allowing for the looting of Eastern European, French, Norwegian, and Austrian forests, as well as the exploitation of forests in Romania, Sweden, and Finland, whose industries were now forced to "cooperate" with the German timber industry.⁴⁴ The paper industry accordingly expected to profit from an "expanded raw material base" through the invasion of the Soviet Union.⁴⁵ The Ost-Faser-Gesellschaft, a semi-governmental association of German companies in the textile, pulp, and paper sector with the declared aim of economically exploiting the Soviet Union, confiscated large quantities of paper reserves in addition to cotton, flax, wool, and old clothes.⁴⁶ People were similarly abused by the paper industry, with factories employing forced labor, military internees, prisoners of war, and concentration camp inmates: The largest German paper factory, Besthorn in Aschersleben, for example, exploited Soviet and Greek forced laborers, Jewish girls, and prisoners of war from the Soviet Union and France.⁴⁷ Shortly after the Nazi takeover, paper manufacturers also profited directly from the political and racist persecution waged by the regime. Used paper, which was priced in May 1933 at a laughable one Pfennig per kilogram, came from the undesirable books that had been confiscated during the so-called "Aktion wider den undeutschen Geist" (action against the un-German spirit).⁴⁸ If they escaped the book burnings, then Bertha von Suttner's *Die Waffen nieder!* (Lay Down Your Arms!) or Erich Kästner's *Pünktchen und Anton* (Dot and Anton) likely became material for cheap cardboard boxes.

Letters and Study Guides for Students of the Humanities

The humanities held a comparatively marginal position within Nazi academic policy. Numerous humanities scholars liberally adapted their research to Nazi

42 Imort, "Eternal Forest – Eternal Volk."

43 Ibid., 57–58; Radkau, *Holz*, 225–26.

44 Imort, "Eternal Forest – Eternal Volk," 66.

45 ["erweiterte[] Rohstoffbasis"] Dorn, "Rückblick und Ausschau," 10.

46 Ost-Faser-Gesellschaft m.b.H to Reichsstelle für Papier, 06.09.1944. BA, R 8-XIV/27. On the Ost-Faser-Gesellschaft, see Gerlach, *Kalkulierte Morde*, 399–404.

47 Schmidt-Bachem, *Aus Papier*, 306, 311–13.

48 Ibid., 257.

ideology, while the regime exerted its influence on the content of this research and teaching through targeted dismissals and appointments.⁴⁹ After the Nazi takeover, the humanities suffered significant cuts to their professorships and funding, especially in comparison to medicine, technical disciplines, and the natural sciences, which were critical to the war effort. Only new research on pre- and early history, German settlement, or race studies was prioritized.⁵⁰ This was accompanied by a decline in the number of students: The proportion of students in philosophical faculties fell significantly after 1933, from around 19 percent to as low as 8.6 percent in the winter semester of 1939/40, although it rose again during the war.⁵¹ The number of professors also fell by almost 10 percent in the 1930s.⁵²

This marginalization of the humanities stood in sharp contrast to their exaltation in the context of the “war mission of the German humanities” (*Kriegseinsatz der Deutschen Geisteswissenschaften*). At the start of the war, around 700 scholars from numerous disciplines mobilized to establish a research association that sought to prove Germany’s intellectual and scholarly superiority through conferences and an extensive publication series that formed a theoretical basis for legitimizing the war of conquest in the East.⁵³

In terms of distance learning, the humanities were also expected to advance. After all, it was assumed that neither a drawing room nor a laboratory was necessary for teaching these subjects.⁵⁴ The field letters and study guides produced by the philosophical faculties presented in the following paragraphs, however, testify to the fact that the humanities, supposedly frugal in terms of space and material, certainly struggled with the limits of their paper.

Compared to the originally mandated decentralized, individual distance learning, the philosophical faculties arranged supervision rather differently. Several institutes and faculties quickly switched to using serial circulars; they also supported each other with teaching materials. A primary example of such a circular was the *Feldpostbriefe für Studierende der Geisteswissenschaften* (Field Post Letters for Students of the Humanities), which the philosophical faculty at the German Charles University in Prague sent out in DIN A5 format in 1943 and 1944. Starting with the third issue, the University of Vienna also participated.⁵⁵ This cooperation both saved the university teachers work and

49 Grüttner, “Die nationalsozialistische Wissenschaftspolitik.” See also Bialas and Rabinbach, “Introduction.”

50 Mertens, “Die Notgemeinschaft,” 29.

51 Grüttner, *Studenten im Dritten Reich*, 126, 490.

52 Grüttner, “Die nationalsozialistische Wissenschaftspolitik,” 36.

53 Hausmann, “*Deutsche Geisteswissenschaft*”.

54 Oberbefehlshaber der Luftwaffe, “Betr. Jungakademiker,” 11.09.1941, pp. 1–2. UA Jena, BA 2145, no. 1–3.

55 “Bericht betreffend die Studienbetreuung der Wehrmichtsangehörigen,” n.d. [1944], p. 2. UA Vienna, US 330.

resulted from an economy of scarcity, where reprints were only possible once a certain number of copies were ordered for print.⁵⁶

The Prague letters contained both general information and articles on various fields of study, although the thematic essays predominate.⁵⁷ The first letter was preceded by a greeting from the dean, the Slavacist Edmund Schneeweis, which addressed the student-soldiers both warmly and militaristically [Fig. 2]. It contained the promise that study by correspondence was only temporary and that the territorially “displaced” soldiers would return to their home universities at an unspecified point in the future. Until then, the letters would function as a material link between the humanities and the war, between the “generative homeland” and the “fighting front.”⁵⁸ The letter offered soldiers four short essays (followed by references to further reading), each no more than seven pages long, by renowned professors, all of which ideally exemplified Nazi academic ideology.

The first essay, by art historian Karl Swoboda, already conveyed German supremacy in its title: “Deutsche Kulturleistungen in Böhmen und Mähren” (German Cultural Achievements in Bohemia and Moravia), going on to describe 1,000 years of German style and participation in the art and architecture of the Czech lands.⁵⁹ The Nazi occupation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was thus justified with arguments from art history. The classical philologist Viktor Stegemann also made a territorial claim with an essay glorifying Nazi Germany as the renewal of the Roman Empire.⁶⁰ In a brief political history of Germany in the Middle Ages, built on the premise that Europe needed strong leadership on the continent, historian Heinz Zatschek argued that insights into the medieval imperial period reveal how Nazi Germany could preserve and even expand its unity.⁶¹ Folklore scholar Hans Beyer argued for researching *Volkstum*—which he defined as the language, culture, soul, and blood of a group—with a racial science based on hereditary biology and *Völkerpsychologie* (ethnic psychology).⁶² Among these authors, Beyer’s contribution was particularly inglorious. The National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP) and Protection Squads (SS) member supported the regime’s conquests and genocide through his scholarly practice and personally authorized the murder of Polish intellectuals.⁶³ When reading the letter from Prague, soldiers received more than theories guided by nationalist and racist ideology. Through this distorted view of German history, one that legitimized this war of

56 Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung, “Betr. Fernbetreuung der Jungakademiker der Luftwaffe,” 27.07.1942, p. 2. BA, R 1409/12908, no. 10–11.

57 This can be said for the first three issues available to me. *Feldpostbriefe für Studierende der Geisteswissenschaften* 1–3 (1943–1944). tfm Vienna, Sammlung Kindermann, box 230/108.

58 [“entrückt”; “schaffender Heimat”; “kämpfender Front”].

59 Swoboda, “Deutsche Kulturleistungen.”

60 Stegemann, “Die Antike und wir,” esp. 13.

61 Zatschek, “Unser Bild vom deutschen Mittelalter.”

62 Beyer, “Sprache und Volkstum.”

63 Wiedemann, “Hans Joachim Beyer.”

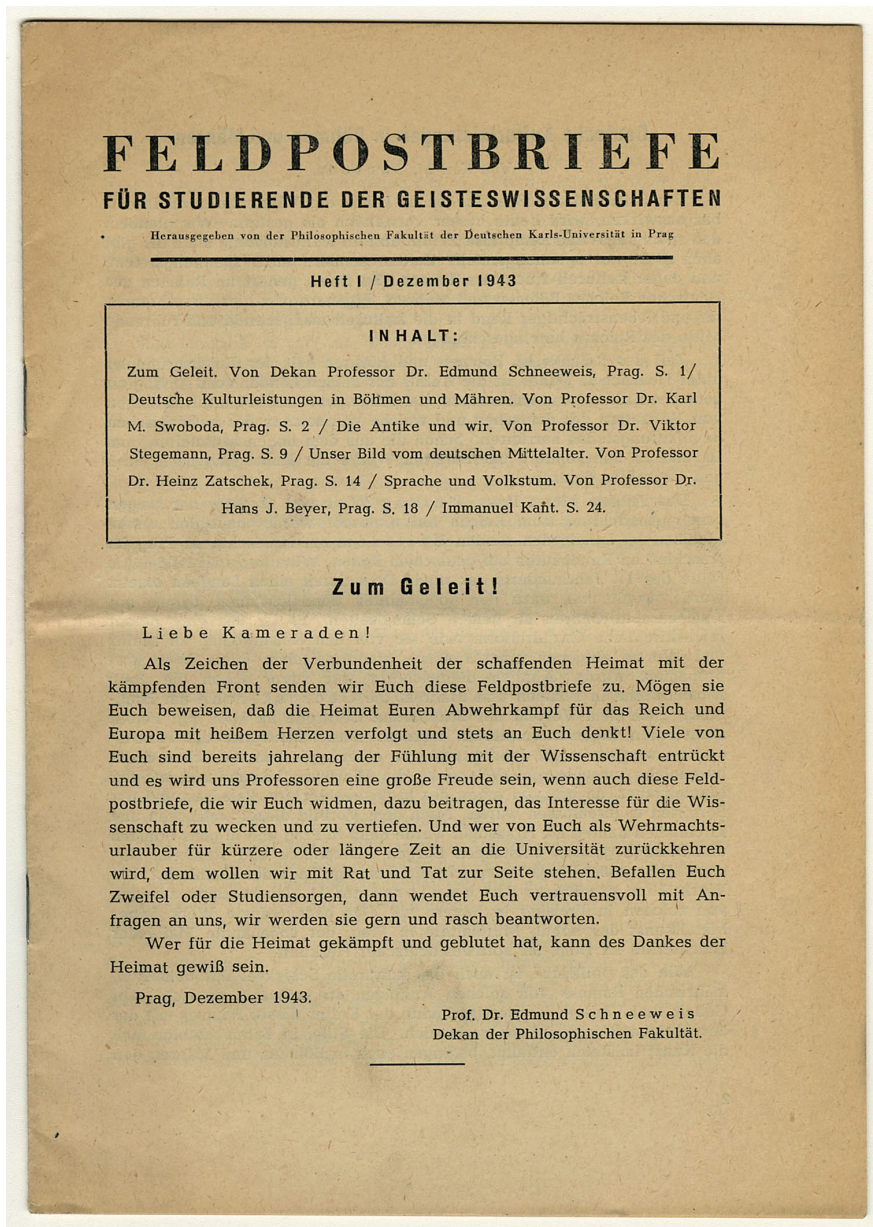


Figure 2. Title page of the first issue of *Feldpostbriefe für Studierende der Geisteswissenschaften* from Prague. Title page of: *Feldpostbriefe für Studierende der Geisteswissenschaften* 1 (1943). Universität Wien, tfm Archiv und Sammlungen, Sammlung Kindermann, Box 230/108. © Universität Wien, tfm Archiv und Sammlungen.

conquest, they were urged to continue fighting while learning that the goal of their conquest rested on a scholarly foundation.

The philosophical faculty of the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich began to disseminate its own circulars from around the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943.⁶⁴ Produced by the university press Dr. C. Wolf & Sohn, the letters were somewhat larger in dimension than a modern-day postcard, about 11.6 by 17.6 centimeters, contained between about thirty and forty pages, and were designed to be sent by field post. They could be cut open on the right-hand side and contained a pre-printed address field on the back to indicate a name and field post number. Designed primarily as introductions to various fields of study, outlining course contents and requirements, these treatises were reasonably restrained with regard to their display of Nazi academic ideology. Racist ideologies and terminology were nevertheless present in the texts written by well-known professors with NSDAP membership. Some editions included introductions to the disciplines of philosophy, art history, German, English, French, Italian, literature and linguistics, psychology, history, newspaper studies (*Zeitungswissenschaft*), and the genuinely Nazi discipline of genealogical research.⁶⁵ Other editions consisted of only one longer introductory essay on topics in classical philology or philosophy.⁶⁶ Another letter on a militaristic subject from classical archaeology appeared as a special issue in the form of the richly illustrated DIN A5-sized booklet entitled *Das Kriegertum der Parthenonzeit* (The Warrior Class of the Parthenon Era), showing soldiers at the front how their current activities were reflected in objects of historical study.⁶⁷

The brevity with which these treatises from Prague and Vienna conveyed Nazi research and course content and the particularly compact format of the Munich letters were likely also due to the limited availability of paper and to weight restrictions on field post. The paper shortage becomes particularly evident in the *Blätter zur Betreuung unserer im Felde stehenden Kameraden* (Pages for the Supervision of our Comrades in the Field) that the Institute for Theater Studies at the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena sent out between 1942 and 1944. Some of the booklets were so densely written in typewriter script that hardly a square centimeter of paper remained unused [**Fig. 3**].⁶⁸

64 Raith, "Die Feldpostbriefe der Fakultäten," 569.

65 *Feldpostbrief der Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität München 1* (n.d.). UA Munich, D-XVII-59; *Feldpostbrief der Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität München 2* (n.d.). UA Munich, D-XVII-60; *Feldpostbrief der Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität München 4* (n.d.) [1944]. UB Munich, WU 8 Z 76-78/4.

66 *Feldpostbrief der Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität München 3* (n.d.) [1944]. UB Munich, WU 8 Z 76-78/3; *Studienbrief der Philosophischen Fakultät der Universität München 6* (n.d.). UA Munich, D-XVII-60.

67 Buschor, *Das Kriegertum der Parthenonzeit*.

68 *Die Theaterwissenschaft. Blätter zur Betreuung unserer im Felde stehenden Kameraden, herausgegeben vom Theaterwissenschaftlichen Institut der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena* 1/1-12 (1942-1943); 2/1-6, 9-10 (1943-1944). tfm Vienna, Sammlung Kindermann, box 230/108.

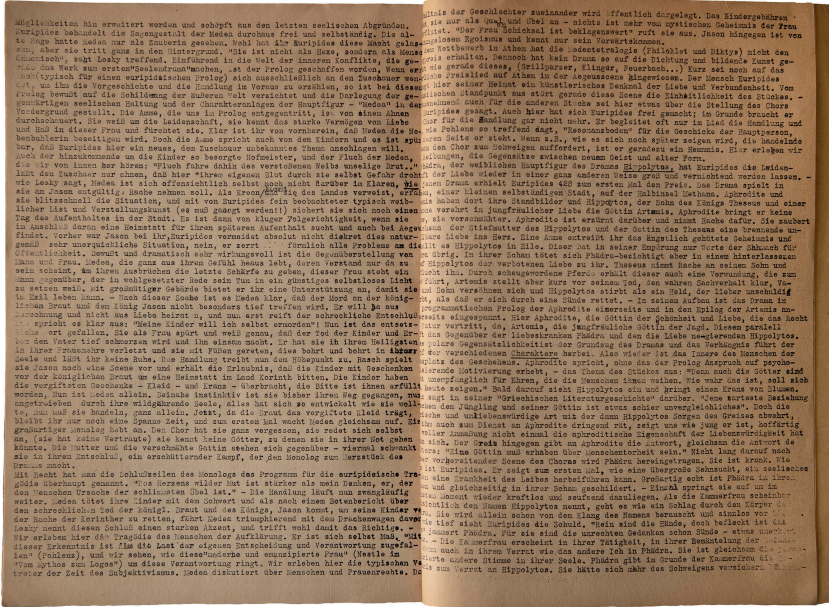


Figure 3. Double page from an issue of *Blätter zur Betreuung unserer im Felde stehenden Kameraden* from the Institute for Theater Studies in Jena. The corresponding article, written by a student, is the product of a seminar. It deals with the work of the Euripides and is remarkably free of ideology. Pages from: Brigitta E. Uhlemann: "Euripides," in *Die Theaterwissenschaft. Blätter zur Betreuung unserer im Felde stehenden Kameraden*, herausgegeben vom Theaterwissenschaftlichen Institut der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena 1, no. 11-12 (1943): n.p. Universität Wien, tfm Archiv und Sammlungen, Sammlung Kindermann, Box 230/108. © Universität Wien, tfm Archiv und Sammlungen.

Another example from theater studies is the *Rundbriefe des Zentralinstituts für Theaterwissenschaft an der Universität Wien* (Circulars of the Central Institute for Theater Studies at the University of Vienna), five issues of which were mailed between 1943 and 1944. These letters were apparently only somewhat affected by the paper shortage. The poor quality of the paper, evident in the rough folds, coarse and fibrous texture, and the bleach, points to the limitations placed on the paper industry by autarky and the wartime economy. However, the institute seems to have been comparatively well supplied, as the letters in this series contained detailed reports on course content and institute events, and even transcriptions of entire speeches. However, their production was affected by the constraints of the publishing and printing sectors, which in turn can be traced back to the paper shortage. While the first four issues were

printed at the university press Adolf Holzhausen, the fifth had to remain type-written because by August 1944 most printers, publishers, bookstores, and libraries throughout Nazi Germany had closed due to a shortage of paper.⁶⁹ The *Feldpostbriefe der Heidelberger Zeitungswissenschaftler* (Field Post Letters of the Heidelberg Newspaper Scholars), on the other hand, managed without envelopes by printing letter sheets folded so that the reverse functioned as the envelope.⁷⁰

Other educational materials did not even come to fruition due to the paper shortage. In the series of study guides devoted to cultural studies, the production of planned volumes on philosophy, pedagogy, ethnology, English, Romance studies, Slavic studies, art, and musicology was discontinued only a few weeks after their announcement, “as a result of a sudden exacerbation of the paper situation.”⁷¹ One of the few planned study guides that was actually published, *Deutsche Mundarten* (German Dialects) by linguist Walther Mitzka, was composed of paper clearly marked by autarky and the wartime economy: The approximately 200 pages of the paperback volume are so coarse that some letters appear fragmented on the page. The first page praised the “national enthusiasm for the old tribal folk traditions”—an enthusiasm that made sources on German language history available for research—and immediately made clear that this brittle paper was to transmit a pedagogy of *völkisch*, nationalist ideology.⁷²

When they were produced at all, most of the educational media likely remained at the front. Not least because of the paper shortage, only copies that were kept by universities as samples or returned because they could not be delivered remain in university archives. Even rarer are replies from students themselves. A letter from the unspecified “East” printed in the journal of the Reichsstudentenwerk in response to the *Feldpostbrief des Reichsstudentenführers* described how the sender read from the letter to other soldiers in the “bunker immediately behind the main battle line” and how they discussed its contents.⁷³

This insight into the surreal encounter between everyday life at the front and academic studies and into a soldier’s desire for some form of distraction (as seen in a letter that very well could have been staged or censored) is also evident in the replies found in the files held at the Institute for Newspaper Studies in Heidelberg. One soldier reported that “the hunger among all for

69 Bühler and Bühler, *Der Frontbuchhandel*, 70–86.

70 *Feldpostbrief der Heidelberger Zeitungswissenschaftler* 1, 29.02.1944; *Feldpostbrief der Heidelberger Zeitungswissenschaftler* 2, 27.06.1944. UA Heidelberg, Rep. 121/7.

71 [“infolge einer plötzlich eingetretenen Verschärfung der Papierlage”] Reichsminister für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung to Reichsstudentenführung, 11.11.1943. BA, R 4901/12908, no. 77.

72 [“landesmännische Begeisterung für das alte stammheitliche Volkstum”] Mitzka, *Deutsche Mundarten*, 1.

73 [“Bunker unmittelbar hinter der Hauptkampflinie”] “Aus der Mappe der Antworten.”

scholarly activity is immense.”⁷⁴ Another described the sense of extraordinary distance these pieces of paper from a small university town triggered amid the mayhem of the war he was fighting. In the violent and, to him, seemingly hopeless everyday life of war in the Soviet Prypyat swamps, he wrote of “death, horror, and extermination all around,” interrupting the detailed letter of thanks to throw grenades at approaching Russian soldiers. He then went on to ask for further glimpses of “your happy world,” as “we are but a parched sponge here and grateful for all you give us of your wealth.”⁷⁵ When registering for correspondence courses, a soldier stationed at an unspecified location in Africa repeatedly asked to be “excused for the paper, etc.” and apologized for the “paper and writing, but African conditions prevail here.”⁷⁶ The soldier thus testified, not without racist sentiment, that the material situation in the war zones must have been at least as challenging as that of the universities in Nazi Germany.

Conclusion

Nazi distance education was a ministerially ordered program that universities and their departments implemented in different ways beginning in 1942. The individualized supervision that was initially ordered was quickly supplemented by a program of standardized lesson plans and a series of study guides. In the letters between soldiers and teachers, circulars from faculties and institutes, the *Soldatenbriefe für Studenten*, the *Feldpostbriefe des Reichsstudentenführers*, textbooks, and reference books, paper media played a central role at all stages. However, the program could only be implemented in a rudimentary way, in large part because of a paper shortage brought about by the regime through its own wartime economics. To make the country self-sufficient in terms of paper supply, the paper industry had been strictly controlled since 1934, with the production and use of paper strictly regulated. The paper industry thus became directly involved in the exploitation inherent in the war of conquest.

The field letters and study guides for students in the humanities that circulated despite these circumstances were characterized by a twofold scarcity, determined both by wartime economics and the demand for efficiency during

74 [“der Hunger bei Allen nach wissenschaftlicher Betätigung ungeheuer groß ist”] Karlfriedrich Hohn to Institut für Zeitungswissenschaft der Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 16.05.1944. UA Heidelberg, Rep. 121/7.

75 [“Tod, Grauen und Auslöschung ringsumher”; “ihre glückliche Welt”; “Wir sind hier nur ein ausgedorrter Schwamm und sind dankbar für alles, was Sie uns von ihrem Reichtum schenken.”] Heinrich Karsten to Institut für Zeitungswissenschaft der Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 07.04.1944. UA Heidelberg, Rep. 121/7.

76 [“Entschuldigung wegen des Papiers u.s.w.”] Werner Krzewitz to Institut für Zeitungswissenschaft der Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 21.07.1942. UA Heidelberg, Rep. 121/7; [“Papier und Schrift, aber es herrschen hier eben afrikanische Zustände”] Werner Krzewitz to Institut für Zeitungswissenschaft der Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 19.08.1942. UA Heidelberg, Rep. 121/7.

World War II. These educational media not only demonstrate the scarcity of raw materials and basic materials (*Werkstoffe*) but also communicated in the most efficient manner possible the content of humanities courses and research from the home institute—as well as theories legitimizing the surrounding war of conquest. As such, they were inextricably linked to the wartime state of emergency—both the emergency economy and emergency education. The small size of the texts, the tightly printed pages, and the poor quality of the paper were responses to the shortage of raw and secondary materials caused by autarky and the wartime economy. It is possible that stolen wood and other raw materials from occupied territories were used in copies from the later years of the war. Thus, in short, distance education was carried out because of the lack of paper, not despite it. While the letters show material and formal traces of the paper shortage, they also pursued the ideological goal of legitimizing the theft of resources in the war. In this respect, the humanities were involved in both the consumption and procurement—or rather, theft—of paper. They joined the fight by inventing a German national history that was integrated into the resource economy of the war and could reach the front via letter.

The brevity of the texts, however, leaves no doubt that combat was the highest priority. Studying therefore should and could only take place during short pauses in the fighting. Given the lack of material resources and time, correspondence coursework could hardly encompass a comprehensive academic education. Rather, teaching materials were meant to offer soldiers rudimentary contact with the humanities and, most of all, with propaganda, just barely enough to keep their minds minimally active and leave enough time for warfare. Or, as soldier Rudolf Deurer reported back to the Institute for Newspaper Studies at Heidelberg University from his deployment in Paris, “the concise compilation of material is very valuable for the occasional engagement with newspaper studies” [Fig. 4].⁷⁷

To be sure, the humanities were not the only disciplines to offer distance learning, to deal with the difficulties of paper supply, and to be involved in the economic exploitation of these materials. But the utility of their correspondence courses was also emphasized as the war progressed, for “young doctors, engineers, physicists, and chemists are needed for immediate war tasks, but beyond that, together with humanities scholars of all fields, they are also needed for the future work of peace.”⁷⁸ It was therefore precisely these teaching materials that were intended to encourage Wehrmacht soldiers to continue fighting by conjuring the prospect of a professional future in a

77 [“Die knappe Zusammenstellung des Stoffes ist sehr wertvoll für die gelegentliche Beschäftigung mit zeitungswissenschaftlichen Studien.”] Rudolf Deurer to Institut für Zeitungswissenschaft der Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 03.08.1944. UA Heidelberg, Rep. 121/7.

78 [“Junge Ärzte, Ingenieure, Physiker und Chemiker werden für unmittelbare Kriegsaufgaben benötigt, darüberhinaus aber zusammen mit Geisteswissenschaftlern aller Gebiete auch für die künftige Arbeit des Friedens.”] “Mitt. u. Bekanntg. d. ‘Soldatendienstes des Reichsstudentenführers’ 1/44,” Januar 1944, p. 3. UA Berlin, RS.01, 0247, no. 234–45.

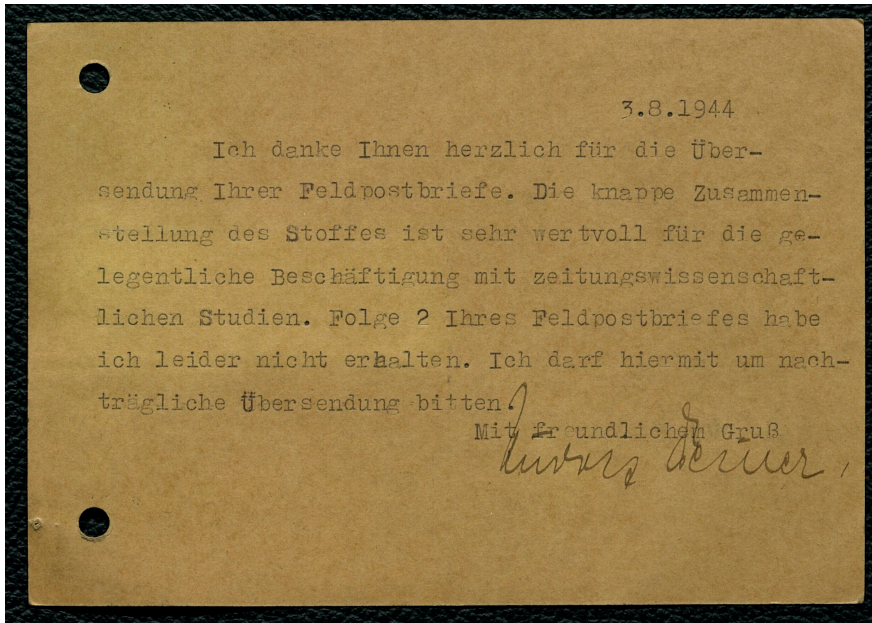


Figure 4. Letter from a student, Rudolf Deurer, in response to one of the *Feldpostbriefe der Heidelberger Zeitungswissenschaftler*. This field postcard (*Feldpostkarte*) is one of the few extant examples of a reply from a studying soldier in a university archive. Rudolf Deurer to Institut für Zeitungswissenschaft der Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg, 03.08.1944. Universitätsarchiv Heidelberg, Rep. 121/7. © Universitätsarchiv Heidelberg.

“normal” life that would soon begin after the war—even once the tide of the war had turned against the Wehrmacht and defeat was becoming increasingly apparent. After the proclaimed *Endsieg* (final victory), the regime claimed, soldiers would smoothly (re-)join their studies and professions, and the system of emergency supply would be abolished.

About the Author

Lotte Schübler is a postdoctoral scholar at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science. She obtained her PhD in media studies from Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin with a dissertation on large-scale theater exhibitions around 1900. This article is also part of a larger DFG-funded research project, “Raw Materials of the Humanities: Material Provenances of Research Media,” based at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

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