The graduate program in German is recognized internationally for its comprehensive coverage of German studies and the thorough preparation of candidates for its graduate degrees. The German program is consistently among the most highly rated in the country and is near the top of the list of North American institutions in number of total graduate degrees granted in German. Graduates teach in colleges and universities across the country and around the world, affirming the department's reputation and significance.

The department is the home of the quarterly Monatshefte (http://monatshefte.org/), founded in 1899 and one of the leading peer-reviewed international scholarly journals in the field of German literature and culture. The Journal of Germanic Linguistics (http://german.lss.wisc.edu/~sgl/journal.html), journal of the Society for Germanic Linguistics, is also produced in the department. In addition, the department provides an editorial home for Diachronica (http://benjamins.com/catalog/journals/dia/main/), an international journal covering all aspects of historical and comparative linguistics. The Max Kade Institute (http://mki.wisc.edu/) for German-American Studies, founded in 1983, is an international center for research on German-American history, language, and culture. Its research and outreach missions aim to provide better understanding of how German-speaking immigrants to this country helped shape their new environment and how they have been shaped by it. The Center for German and European Studies (http://daadcenter.wisc.edu/) (CGES), one of a handful of DAAD-sponsored centers in the US, is helping educate a new generation of experts on Germany and the new Europe across a wide variety of disciplines. It supports collaborative research and teaching of interdisciplinary and graduate seminars, and provides fellowships for graduate students interested in German and European studies.

The department offers a broadly inclusive and flexible curriculum in the entire range of medieval through contemporary literature and culture, a full spectrum of linguistics and philology, and a program in Dutch language, literature, and culture. The program is unsurpassed in comprehensive representation of the entire field of the study of German through individual faculty members' specializations and research publications, including: early modern and medieval studies; film and media studies; multicultural literature and cosmopolitanism; Gegenwartsliteratur; literary and cultural theory; Holocaust studies; poetics, stylistics, and narratology; 18th-century studies; literature in its sociocultural context; literary and cultural theory; Dutch literature and linguistics; historical and synchronic linguistics; applied linguistics, second language acquisition, and foreign language education. Offerings include interdisciplinary areas such as literature and other arts (especially image/text, visual culture, and literature/music), German-Americana, literature and philosophy, and German–Jewish relations.

Graduate students are encouraged to pursue inter- and multidisciplinary work beyond the Department of German in such areas as art history, communication arts/cinema, comparative literature, history, linguistics, musicology, Scandinavian studies, visual studies, and women and gender studies. The department cooperates closely with the interdepartmental programs in European studies, medieval studies, Jewish studies, and second language acquisition.