“I am submitting my honors college thesis to you forty years late. It was due in 1967. . . .”

So begins a September 2007 letter addressed to Clark Honors College director Richard Kraus. Phil Hansen ’67, J.D. ’70, certainly intended to complete his honors thesis on schedule, but his senior year presented him with some tough hurdles to overcome.

A steeplechase runner for Bill Bowerman’s Pacific-8 Conference track-and-field championship team, Hansen was firmly entrenched in the legendary coach’s running regime. By 1967, his senior year at the UO, Hansen was doing three daily workouts and running a cool hundred miles per week while “hashing”—serving food and washing dishes— for his meals at the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority house.

That year, Hansen placed fourth in steeplechase and Oregon won the Pac-8 meet, held on the cinder track at Hayward Field. Hansen missed his own undergraduate commencement ceremony while running in the NCAA championships in Provo, Utah—and while there, gleefully streaking the Brigham Young University campus with other
distance runners, a stunt that the bawdy Bowerman never heard about, but might have approved. Hansen posted a respectable 3.2 final GPA in his major, Germanic languages. But his honors thesis—a planned dissertation on Friedrich Dürrenmatt, the Swiss dramatist—fell by the wayside.

“After that, law school and a career in law and public accounting got in the way . . . .”

That fall, Hansen joined the flock of Duck law students in Fenton Hall. Living in typical student squalor, driving the Tino’s Pizza delivery truck at night, he stretched his academic wings and prepared for a career in tax law. Now married to his college sweetheart, Susan Pennington ’68, Hansen added a full load of undergraduate accounting courses to his law school curriculum and responsibilities as senior class president. Upon graduation he accepted a Bay Area position with accounting giant Ernst and Ernst (now Ernst and Young), which segued into a sixteen-year stint as income tax manager and trial attorney for United States Leasing International in San Francisco.

When he wasn’t dashing around the country trying tax cases, he and Susan were busy with their three children. “I was very lucky,” says Hansen. “I had a great career. I was able to travel, plus I spent a lot of time with my kids. I was a Little League coach, sort of a part-time ‘soccer dad.’ I got to know every gymnasium in Marin County.” Sadly, Susan Hansen passed away after a long illness.

Eventually, a company merger altered his job and his focus. “Suddenly, my kids were out of college, I didn’t need to work anymore, and I just quit. Retired at age fifty-three, and never went back.” Hansen played some golf, took up walking and hiking. He met and married his second wife, Teresa, and they traveled to Germany and Italy. And Hansen reconnected with the University, working with the law school’s alumni committee to solicit funds for scholarships.

In 2005, a German department newsletter caught his attention. “Susan Anderson was the department head at that time,” Hansen recalls. “And she had written a little blurb about wanting to fund some scholarships . . . and a light went on in my head. My kids were grown, and I was financially comfortable enough to do something for my school. The law school was already doing very well, and I realized that my heart was back at Friendly Hall.”

Memories of his undergraduate days inspired Hansen: He reminisced about warm student gatherings at the home of Professor Astrid Williams, who prepared authentic Norwegian dinners and pastries for her guests. He recalled donning a silly cape and costume to perform as Übermensch [Superman] in a German play for Professor Ed Diller. Thoughts of recent increases in educational costs also helped propel him to action.
Costs were more manageable back then. “I worked summers in the Diamond A [Agripac] cannery,” says Hansen. “In the 1960s, tuition was $110 per term, and you could earn enough in a summer to cover a year’s expenses. It’s a changed world—I think that’s impossible now.” Hansen contacted Anderson and endowed a scholarship for an undergraduate German major. “That was so much fun,” he relates, “that I set up a second one a few weeks later.” Since 2005, the Philip and Teresa Hansen Germanic Languages and Literatures Scholarships have been awarded annually to two undergraduate German majors nominated by the faculty. In 2008 Hansen added an annual $2,000 stipend for a deserving graduate student.

“The department was overjoyed with Hansen’s generosity,” says Susan Anderson, “and the scholarship recipients are so very, very happy for this wonderful help from Phil.” Hansen started visiting Eugene annually to meet with his “Hansen scholars” and to rekindle friendships with his former professors.

“*The writing I have done will probably be a bit more useful than what I would have written forty years ago* . . . *which would only have yellowed and collected dust.*”

Then, early in 2007, Hansen’s daughter Meredith unearthed her grandmother’s college German textbook and handed it over to her dad. The 1931 text’s editors were University of Oregon professors Edmund P. Kremer, F. G. G. Schmidt, and J. H. Mueller. Out of curiosity, Hansen contacted Susan Anderson to see if the German department had any information about these professors.

The answer was no. Hansen was stunned, and volunteered to do a little digging himself. “I should have shut my mouth!” he laughs. “My little research project turned into a full-time job.”

Starting with Internet sources, Hansen gleaned information from libraries and archives at the UO and Multnomah County. Enlisting Teresa as a research assistant, he travelled to Eugene, interviewed former faculty members and their spouses, and pored over dusty scrapbooks and photo albums. As his piles of notes took shape, Hansen asked for editing help from Associate Professor Emeritus Helmut Plant. “He was a godsend,” says Hansen. “My German skills had diminished over the years, even though back in the Sixties I was speaking, reading, and dreaming in German.” The project was organized chronologically, and nine months later, Hansen self-published his work. On a whim, he decided to submit *The History of Germanic Languages at Oregon* to the Clark Honors College as his much-overdue thesis.

“It was always his intention to make the book interesting and readable, not just a dry, historic recounting of events,” says Susan Anderson, “and he did an amazing job. We’ve
had so much fun seeing the old photographs, reading about times past, and sharing with our alumni and other departments.”

In October 2007, Hansen received a response from the Clark Honors College:

“We are going to treat your work as a slightly tardy but splendidly completed Honors College thesis, and include it proudly in our library. We also may brag about you from time to time. Sincerely, Richard Kraus, Director.”

—Katherine Gries ’05

For more information on Hansen’s book, visit www.blurb.com/bookstore/detail/107480.

Sprechen Sie Deutsch?
An excerpt from The History of Germanic Languages at Oregon.

The activities of the Oregon German Club usually involved a sampling of German culture. Not surprisingly, the most popular activities involved food and drink. In the 1960s the German Club met from time to time at the Bavarian Restaurant underneath the Ferry Street Bridge, which was a regular meeting place for the Eugene citizens of German heritage, as well as university students, the so-called “town-and-gown” community. This was immensely popular with the beer-drinking crowd. Who can ever forget the hasenpfeffer and German beer on tap at the Bavarian on Friday nights? The restaurant’s owners and waitresses were German, and sitting at the large round table and conversing in German with the locals was a worthy challenge for the more advanced students.