Microsoft’s Access is a software program that does not lend itself to easy use in a classroom. Access is a database management program that allows tracking and reporting information with ease, as the program claims. I personally did not find Access easy to use and have not found the application to accomplish a task that could not have been done in Excel simply by sorting. The program is probably very useful for large companies with multiple offices in various locations. In a classroom setting with ten to twenty eight students I do not really see an immediate need for the program.

Students could use Access to keep track of books or assignment requirements, especially assignments that network with more than one teacher, such as a presentation on the Austrian government that counts as a grade both for AP Government and German II. Unfortunately, projects like that are extremely rare if non-existent due to lack of interest from other teachers, and therefore a database is unnecessary. Students could also keep track of their books that they lend to others or borrow from others or CDs. With the new trend of i-pods and students not really exchanging books, it is also a by-gone necessity.

In German class itself I cannot think of a database that students would need to keep other than vocabulary which is not the type of database that Access lends itself to. Students keep track of people by cell phone, not an organized computer database. They do not really have to manage thousands, or even hundreds, of pieces of information. Theoretically, they could keep track of their grades and their GPA, but the school system has very sophisticated systems in place that do this work automatically. This information is easily accessible by administrators, teachers, students, and parents.

I can only think of two ways in which German students may want to keep a database. One would be if there was a German club where students want to keep track of attendance, activities, birthdays, and student contact information. Since a club is mostly student run the teacher is acting in a mostly supervisory function. Clubs typically attract students from different levels of German. Therefore transferring data directly from school-based programs, such as IGPRO or SCORE is generally not an option without running into confidentiality issues. In this case, a database can be assembled annually and managed by officers of the club to keep track of attendance, the budget, and activities, such as fundraisers and field trips. Sponsors could have their own database. It would be useful to be able to sort sponsors by kind of contribution. A digital database in a club would have clear advantages over a paper database because the latter might be lost, or unavailable if the designated keeper becomes sick. Student officers could be held summarily accountable, as opposed to leaving the paper database with the teacher, thus transferring responsibilities. A disadvantage would be the fact that a digital version can be altered. It would have to be stored on a shared drive in order to be accessible. Confidential information might leak into unauthorized hands.

Another similar use for a database in German would be the planning of a Germany trip, either actual or virtual, especially if different grade levels participate – or different schools. It could be used by students to comparison shop for accommodations and flights, or contain a list of data on exchange students, their families, homes and hobbies. The database could then be used to match exchange students efficiently and thus ensure a smooth integration at both ends. Again, caution is dictated due to the sensitivity of information that might be better off in the hands of teachers rather than students. As with the previous suggestion, such a database might be managed best by placing data collection in the hands of students, but placing the guardianship in the hands of a teacher who would supervise reports and queries and ensure that sensitive information remains confidential. In that fashion, students would learn how to create and manage a database. At the same time they would learn that data are power and therefore need to be handled with extreme care.

In conclusion, it has become clear that due to existing databases in the school system and changed habits in the student body, the need to create an additional database is extremely remote. Only large participation in multi-class or multi-school events might prompt such a need, a need which most of the time can be fulfilled by using a spreadsheet rather than a database since German classes and events with more than fifteen participants tend to be the rare exception rather than the rule. The use would therefore be limited to occasional use by select students who show an interest in creating and maintaining a database. I do not see a possibility of integrating a database into a mainstream classroom activity.