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College of Letters & Science Assessment Report April 1998

Department of Classics

As proposed in the Plans for Assessment which the Department submitted to the College in January 1997, we initiated our internal assessment this semester with a survey of our graduate students (with the intention of holding a similar assessment of our undergraduate program next year, and thereafter alternating in subsequent years).

The responses which we received from our current graduates (18 at present in Madison) were extremely positive and encouraging. Students report very favorably on the high intellectual standards set by Faculty, and for the most part express overall satisfaction with the program, commenting particularly on the friendly *rapport* which exists between graduates and Faculty. Many students expressed their appreciation of the time devoted by Faculty to discussing their course-work and research on a one-to-one basis. Despite this essentially favorable assessment, however, certain concerns were made clear, and the Department will be keen to address these as soon as possible. Some of these observations are relatively minor (e.g. the need for the updating and improvement of the departmental Web-Site), but others are more consequential:

1. It was felt that more courses might be offered at the 500 level, in order to give the graduate students more choice in the authors and topics studied. It was noted that graduates are often restricted to courses in the most essential authors, while being left to read the more esoteric texts on the Ph.D. reading list by themselves, and it was felt to be a disadvantage that these courses have to be shared with upper-level undergraduates, whose presence necessarily limits the expectations set for such a course. It was also noted, specifically, that Latin prose texts are not very strongly represented among the courses offered. Given the demands made

on our teaching, it may not be possible to do more than a limited amount to relieve this perennial problem. We shall, however, wish to consider very seriously the suggestion that it might be possible to institute a practice of expecting a greater and different workload from graduates enrolled in a course shared with undergraduates. Shortfall in coverage will be, to some extent, ameliorated by a new appointment to the Faculty, who specializes in Latin prose texts.

2. It was felt that the Department might institute a seminar instructing (incoming) graduate students in the essential skills required for research, not only, for example, literary criticism, textual criticism, palaeography, but also e.g. bibliographical expertise and the application of computing to the study of the Classics. The Department did, in fact, offer such a seminar in past years, but it was felt that such basic training was most effectively inculcated in relation to specific texts and courses. We therefore have been incorporating advice and instruction in these matters as and when the need for them was perceived in particular contexts, within the structure of particular courses, in particular in seminars. In light of these comments in the survey, however, we shall wish to review the desirability of reinstating the Pro-Seminar.

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