

Undergraduate Assessment

Department of Classics

University of Wisconsin

May 16, 2008

Annual undergraduate assessment in Classics consists of three parts: 1) evaluation of our students' progress in learning the original languages, 2) consideration of their research skills in the capstone seminar, and 3) exit surveys of all graduating majors in Classical Languages and Literature, and Classical Humanities. As evidenced by faculty reports below, current Classics students are performing admirably across all three categories.

Course Sequences in the Language Programs

A faculty committee consisting of Professor Patricia Rosenmeyer and Visiting Assistant Professor Max Goldhill evaluated student progress in two intermediate language courses, Greek 306 and Latin 302 (as below).

Latin 302: Literature of the Roman Empire

Seven students enrolled in Latin 302 this spring: one freshman, two sophomores, three juniors and one graduating senior. All are classical or classical humanities majors. The class read selections from Vergil's Aeneid, consisting of most of books 1, 2 and 4. The class focused on poetic elements and composed as a group a handout of poetic language found in the selections. They also read several articles and a book, producing an annotated bibliography on Aeneid 4. Five of them received an A and the other two received a B. All are ready to continue with Latin at the 500 level, which six plan to do. The students were highly engaged and enthusiastic.

Greek 306: Fourth Semester Ancient Greek

Fifteen students enrolled in Greek 306 this Spring. There were four graduate students (three from History; one from Hebrew and Semitic Studies); seven BA students; two BS students; one JBA; and one PRM. The grade distribution was 10 As, 2 ABs, 2 Bs, 1 C. Many were either Classics or Classical Humanities majors. The class covered 2 books of Homer's *Iliad* (books 1 and 6 with selections from 24); learned to read dactylic hexameter, and read and discussed essays on gender, heroism, and the historical aspects of Homeric society. The course required two midterms, frequent vocabulary quizzes, and a final exam with an essay component.

Classics 591: Capstone Seminar

A committee consisting of Professor Laura McClure and Associate Professor William Aylward reviewed five randomly selected term papers from Classics 591, the Undergraduate Seminar, from the spring semester, 2008.

All of the papers took a comparative approach to the reception of Venus/Aphrodite in art, cinema and literature from the classical world to Victorian Europe and Hollywood. The papers tackled a range of interesting topics, from the use of metaphor in the ancient novel to classical allusions in a Woody Allen movie. The students demonstrated their

understanding of academic discourse by situating their ideas in a scholarly context and including extensive citations. They also showed their ability to analyze complex literary texts. Because of the comparative emphasis, students unfortunately did not work in the original languages, the major advantage of being a Classics major. Overall, the students demonstrated an impressive level of sophistication in their treatment of literary and visual materials and reinforced the notion that Classics is central to a Liberal Arts education.

Exit Surveys

Upon graduation, the Undergraduate Advisor, Professor William Aylward, administered a survey to seniors with a Classical Humanities or Classics major, or a Certificate in Classical Studies. The survey requested responses to questions about overall program quality, quality of instruction, registration and enrollment procedures, and quality of departmental advising.

All of the students expressed great satisfaction with their undergraduate experience in the Classics department. Their greatest concern was the overall lack of courses in Classics offered from semester to semester. Since the department teaches many of the same courses each year (e.g., 300, 304, 320, 322, 370), majors quickly consume these options and find it difficult to find other Classics courses on the timetable to satisfy requirements. The need is especially acute now that our total FTE count has been so dramatically reduced.

Respondents also suggested that Classics attempt to become more visible on campus; the idea being that the department might be able to have more majors if it has better marketing. It was encouraging to learn that undergraduate majors and certificates are using the Greek and Latin Reading Room in Memorial Library, participating in the Classics Society (a registered student organization), and attending lectures by speakers invited by the department.

As for the future, a few students plan to continue graduate study in Classics, while others expressed the intent to enter graduate study in law, business, or history. German was the modern language mostly commonly studied by our majors. Most rewarding was a comment from one respondent about the importance of Classics for real-world experience: this student stated that the study of Classics helped foster problem-solving skills and skills for negotiating challenges of incomplete sets of data or texts.

The surveys also made it clear that Classics 370: Classical Mythology was a key gateway course for our majors and a recurring personal favorite. Conversely, students pointed to Classics 561: Greek and Roman Medicine and Pharmacology and Latin Palaeography (courses outside of Classics) as low points of their experience with Classics, primarily because of the manner in which these courses had been taught.