

Undergraduate Assessment

Department of Classics
University of Wisconsin
May 22, 2009

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 Professors Patricia Rosenmeyer and Laura McClure evaluated student progress in two intermediate language courses, Greek 306 and Latin 302 (as below).

Latin 302: Literature of the Roman Empire

Ten students enrolled in Latin 302 this spring: two freshman, one sophomore, three juniors, two seniors and two graduate students from the English department. About half are majoring or double-majoring in Classics. The class read selections from Virgil's *Aeneid*, part of Book 2 and all of Book 4. Daily work consisted of translation of around 30 to 40 lines of Latin, with a view to understanding grammar, syntax, and poetic style. Assessment consisted of weekly quizzes, two midterm exams, a final exam, detailed outlines of all twelve books of the poem, and an oral recitation in Latin. Eight students received an A and the other two received an AB. All are ready to continue with Latin at the 500-level, which six plan to do. The students were highly engaged and enthusiastic about learning Latin.

Greek 306: Homeric Greek

The class enrolled eight students and one informal auditor: one sophomore, two juniors, three seniors, one graduate student from Slavic, one Special Student, and one informal auditor, and a graduate student from the History department. All of the undergraduates enrolled were declared Classics or Classical Humanities majors; one was also a declared Art major. The class read all of Book 1 of Homer's *Iliad*; 350 lines of Book 6; and around 100 lines of Book 24. The students began with assignments of 10 lines per meeting and progressed to around 40 lines per meeting. They also read one essay from the *Oxford Companion to Homer* and discussed larger historical and literary issues. Finally, they became proficient in reading aloud and scanning dactylic hexameter. All of the students performed well and passed the class. Final grades consisted of six As, one AB, and one B. One member of the class will attend graduate school in Classics at Univ. of Arizona in the fall. Of the rest who stay at UW Madison, most will continue on to Greek 401 in the fall.

Classics 591: Capstone Seminar

A committee consisting of Assistant Professor Jeffrey Beneker and Professor Jim McKeown reviewed randomly selected term papers from Classics 591, the

Undergraduate Seminar, for the spring semester, 2009, for which the topic was: *Rome after Nero*.

The papers covered a broad and fairly disparate range of subjects, from the political undercurrents in the epic poetry of Statius, to imperial patronage as manifested in the epigrams of Martial, to the public building program of the emperor Domitian.

All of the papers showed at least a competent understanding of the way in which evidence about antiquity is to be handled in a scholarly way, whether it is in the testimony of ancient artefacts and texts (read for the most part in translation) or sifted by modern scholars in the abundant and excellent secondary literature on this period. The general level of writing in these Capstone papers was admirably high, with very well informed and subtle judgments being made about texts which are, even to professional scholars, either more than usually dense or (as in the case of Martial) not quite so simple as they seem. It is obvious from these papers that the Capstone Seminar is a highly successful part of the Classics Department's contribution to teaching in the University.

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 respondents had completed between two and five years of Latin in our department, and in all cases the reception of Latin language instruction was very positive. In one case, a student remarked that the lecture-format for the Introductory Latin course does not offer the intimacy of a small classroom so conducive to language learning.

All respondents were grateful for their experiences in the Department, but a recurring concern was the overall lack of courses in Classics offered from semester to semester. Our majors quickly complete the core course requirements for our degree programs and then struggle to find other courses to earn additional units to satisfy requirements. The cause of this problem lies in the Department's low level of staffing, which has profound consequences on the variety of courses that can be taught. The need is especially acute given the ongoing reduction on our total FTE count.

Participation in the Classics Society (a registered student organization) remained high, and attendance at lectures by speakers invited by the department. At the same time, several students stated that the necessity to hold down a job outside of school was a substantial limitation on time, and inhibited their participation in lectures and student organization activities.

Future directions for our majors include graduate study in Classics, Law, Library and Information Studies, as well as employment in the private sector. German was the

modern language mostly commonly studied by our majors, with French a close second.

The surveys also made it clear that Classics 320 and 322, our Comm-B courses, and Classics 370, Classical Mythology (seniors indicated that they had taken this with Barry Powell), were key gateway courses for our majors. Conversely, students pointed to Ancient Religion (a course taught outside of Classics) as low point of their experience with Classics, primarily because of the manner in which this courses had been taught.