

Undergraduate Assessment

Department of Classics
University of Wisconsin
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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 Grant Nelsestuen 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

Latin 302 is the second semester reading course, in which students read a substantial amount of Latin poetry (Vergil's *Aeneid*). In addition to reading and comprehending the text, students are expected to scan the meter and to engage the text in a critical and meaningful way.

Assessment of students' performance and progress was assessed through the use of 5 quizzes and 3 exams, all of which asked students to translate passages of Latin that they had already seen. In addition, each of the tests required students to translate increasingly difficult, longer, and more heavily weighted unseen passages, so as to assess their sight translation skills. Also, the final test had an oral component, which involved memorizing and reciting a substantial chunk of Latin poetry.

Greek 306: Homeric Greek

This class enrolled 13 students and two auditors, an all-time high. Of these, ten were seniors, two were juniors, and one was a graduate student in the Comparative Literature department. All of the undergraduates enrolled were Classics or Classical Humanities majors; two were also majoring in English. The class read all of Book 1 and around 300 lines of Book 6 of Homers *Iliad*. The students began with assignments of around ten lines per day and work their way up to around 30 lines per meeting. They became familiar with the Greek dialects used by Homer, as well as the peculiarities of Homeric grammar and vocabulary. Discussions focused on the literary interpretation of character, plot and meaning. Three translation and grammar exams assessed the students' progress in the language. To deepen their cultural knowledge, they gave reports and wrote final papers on a variety of topics,

ranging from Homeric weaponry, color terms, formulae, and the character of Helen. All of the students performed exceptionally well.

Classics 591: Capstone Seminar

A committee consisting of Associate Professor William Aylward and Assistant Professor Jeffrey Beneker reviewed randomly selected term papers from Classics 591, the undergraduate capstone seminar, for the spring semester, 2010. The topic for the seminar was Art and Ethics.

The students were asked to respond to a four-part prompt: 1) generate a definition of art that was as general as possible and based on what they'd read in the seminar; 2) consider two ancient accounts of art which both fit and challenge the definition developed in part (1) of the prompt; 3) for at least one instance of part (2), consider the effect of the historical or social context on the development of an author's account of art; and 4) compare and contrast a modern example or account of art, either of their own choosing, or based on the secondary readings.

The sample of papers demonstrated competence in the scholarly approach to ancient texts and to secondary literature. The general level of writing of all the papers was very high. The students were able to state their theses clearly, to construct coherent arguments based on evidence from the primary texts, and to criticize the works of both ancient authors and modern scholars with a good deal of insight and expertise.

Exit Surveys

In May, 2010, Classics administered a survey to seniors with a Classical Humanities or Classics major, or a Certificate in Classical Studies. The survey asks for responses to questions about overall program quality, quality of instruction, registration and enrollment procedures, and quality of departmental advising. Six students responded (out of over 25 graduating seniors in our programs). All expressed great satisfaction with their undergraduate experience in the Classics department.

Gateway-to-the-major experiences identified by respondents included high school Latin and inspiring faculty (Professors Powell, McKeown, and Beneker are named). Most had taken some Latin in high school, but a few did not begin study of ancient language until their sophomore or junior year at UW. Most students had taken modern languages at UW, with French being the most popular choice. About half of the respondents planned to go on to graduate study. Classical Myth was named most frequently as the most favorite course. The greatest concern expressed by students was the mixed-level language courses that enroll both graduate and undergraduate students. Thucydides and Latin 549 were singled out (once each) as the least favorite course. Respondents also suggested that Classics be more involved in the Greek and Latin Reading Room. It was encouraging to learn that undergraduate majors and certificate students are participating in the Classics Society (a registered student organization) and attending lectures by speakers

invited by the department. At the same time, it was surprising that several students claimed to be unaware of prizes and scholarships offered by the department, despite the fact that these are announced frequently in email messages sent to all students. This is perhaps proof that students ignore correspondence from the department. Perhaps we should try Twitter or a departmental Facebook page? The department plans to explore these options when classes resume next fall.

Our graduating seniors will go on to a variety of jobs and career tracks. One will enter the Navy to become a language interpreter. Two will attend graduate school in the fall: one will be studying Classics at the University of Washington and another is going to Stanford University to study the classical tradition and U.S. history. One has a job at Epic Systems, and another is participating in Teach for America. Two other students plan to take some time off, work, and decide on their next step.