

## Revised Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment for the Department of Classical Languages (2011 and after)

### **Department Overview**

Classics is the study of the ancient Greco-Roman world. The evidence from the classical past derives primarily from texts and artifacts that have survived from antiquity, and the work of Classics as a discipline is to understand these texts and artifacts in as full a cultural context as is possible. Therefore, the study of Classics comprises complementary areas of knowledge including language and aspects of culture such as history, politics, social institutions, literature, material culture and art. Within these areas, Classicists recover cultural context by deploying a number of discrete skills of inquiry and analysis, many of which are common to other disciplines, but which are tailored to the needs and conventions of the evidence from classical antiquity. Successful classicists develop habits of mind that allow them to bring fresh approaches and apply evidence in new ways in order to analyze and interpret elements of the classical world.

Through our four major programs of study, some of which require greater proficiency in the ancient languages than others, we seek to provide a suitable introduction to these skills and areas of knowledge for our majors, with the expected learning outcomes listed below. Our aim is to provide our students with multiple opportunities to gain the knowledge and practice the skills we have identified, recognizing that learning is an iterative process that involves as many productive failures as successes. Our senior integrative exercise requires integration of the skills and knowledge to engage in scholarship in the discipline and gain a sense of the wider world of intellectual inquiry, and we attempt to foster the higher order thinking skills necessary for this type of research. At the same time, we acknowledge that our majors are novice practitioners of the discipline and seek to nurture their learning and skills at a level that is appropriate for undergraduates.

### **Student Learning Outcomes for Majors**

#### **a) The Latin and Greek languages**

Direct engagement with the worlds of ancient Greece and Rome is only possible through the study of the sources in their original languages, so knowledge of Greek and/or Latin is the essential core of our majors' learning. Ancient Greek and Latin are primarily experienced through texts; unfortunately, this often leads to their designation as "dead" languages. A better description, however, would be to say that they are in "suspended animation," but even that description belies the enormous range and variety in the languages that have come down to us from classical antiquity. The task of the student of classical languages, therefore, is to "re-animate" the texts in a way that is true to their original context while still being comprehensible to a current reader. The ability to do this type of re-animation is the overall aim of the teaching of classical languages at Carleton, and the result is the experience of crossing the "linguistic border" between our own time and culture and that of the ancient world.

**By the time they graduate our students should be able to:**

- 1) read with comprehension works of poetry and prose in their original language(s) from all periods of classical antiquity, and**
- 2) know how to place these texts in their literary, social and historical context.**

#### **b) The cultures of Ancient Greece and Rome**

While knowledge of the languages is a crucial tool for classicists, the object of our study extends beyond ancient texts to the cultures that produced them. These cultures are known to us through the piecing together of a wide variety of both textual and material sources, and so our students must learn to analyze and interpret literary and non-literary texts, artifacts, social structures and institutions to gain understanding of the diverse and influential cultures classical antiquity comprises. While a deep knowledge of every period and society from Bronze Age Greece through to the fall of the Roman Empire in the East is beyond the scope of the undergraduate major, our aim is to give our students a broad framework into which they can fit some areas of fuller understanding. In addition, we encourage recognition of the lasting influence these cultures had on subsequent generations, and the habit of mind that allows students to think about their own culture with the enlarged perspective that the study of Classics offers.

**By the time they graduate our students should be able to:**

- 1) demonstrate broad understanding of the history and culture of the ancient world, and**
- 2) consider subsequent cultures, including their own, in the deeper context provided by their knowledge of the ancient world.**

#### **c) The Discipline of Classics**

Of equal importance with the skills of reading the languages and analyzing and interpreting the sources to gain knowledge of the history and culture of the ancient world is the ability to engage in the larger conversation that constitutes scholarship in the discipline of Classics. This requires learning to recognize and interrogate the key assumptions underlying both primary and secondary source material, to ask productive questions and solve problems presented by the evidence that survives from classical antiquity, and to communicate the results of research effectively.

**By the time they graduate our students should be able to:**

- 1) Evaluate and make ethical and effective use of secondary sources to situate work in the context of the discipline.**
- 2) Effectively communicate orally and in writing their new ideas about the ancient world to varied audiences.**

## **Conclusion**

The field of Classics engages enduring problems and questions basic to our 21st century world. Ancient voices return again and again to basic ethical topics, from larger social issues such as the difficulties inherent in democracy and empire, to individual concerns with identity and how one ought to live. We believe that most of our learning outcomes complement and enhance the overall liberal arts mission of the college and prepare our majors for a lifetime of learning beyond the discipline.

**Note:** As we move through the assessment process described below, we are hoping to fine-tune our learning outcomes so as to specify expected levels in each area to be reached by a) students in the four different majors we offer (Classical Languages, Classical Studies, Latin and Greek); and b) non-majors. We haven't yet crafted language for this, but will be attempting that in the coming year.

## **Process for Assessment**

The department will assess our effectiveness in helping our students reach these goals on a three-year cycle, gathering some specified data every year but focusing on one of the three areas each year for more specific data and analysis.

In general we plan to think about assessment at two points each year: first, at a beginning-of-year department meeting during new students' week, and then at an end-of-year department meeting during senior week. At the first of these we will consider the courses we have scheduled for the coming year, and particularly which assignments within those courses that will yield data relevant to the year's area of focus; we will hash out a system for collecting and scoring the data appropriately; and we'll set up a central area to store both the raw and the scored data (likely overseen by Jean Sherwin). These discussions will allow us to think about preliminary questions we might have concerning the area we are looking at (e.g. do we have suspicions about areas of weakness in language/culture/disciplinary issues that we'd like to target particularly when we gather and analyze the data?).

When we meet at the end of the year, we will look at reports/rubrics scored by individual faculty members on the data that has come out of the classes they taught, to see if we can spot departmental patterns or share strategies.

This is a new process for us, and we're just going to have to see whether or not it ends up presenting an unsustainable burden, especially for junior faculty. Getting used to constructing appropriate and helpful rubrics, for instance, is likely to take some time at the beginning, but will hopefully become easier as we go and as we assemble a collection of templates. We think that both the beginning-of-year and end-of-year discussions should prove very useful.

Year One: Language

Outcome #1 ("read with comprehension...")

Possible data to collect: the language (translation and parsing) component of final exams for Latin and Greek 204 and relevant upper-level courses.

Outcome #2 (“know how to place texts in context”)

Possible data to collect: Papers will be our primary evidence for this learning outcome. Classics 110 regularly assigns one paper with a prompt that explicitly addresses this goal; we can easily draw a sample from this set of papers each year. Other Classical Studies courses with relevant assignments can contribute to the sample. Additionally Juniors include papers in their Junior Skills Portfolios (JSP) which should provide evidence of contextualizing texts.

Year Two: Culture

Outcome #1 (“demonstrate broad understanding...”)

Possible data to collect: Exams given in Classics 227, 228 and 229 (the history courses) will regularly include sections aimed at this learning outcome, and we will collect samples of these essays. The assessment given to seniors provides the most relevant evidence.

Outcome #2 (“consider subsequent cultures in the context of the ancient world”)

Possible data to collect: Classics 110, the history courses and some other Classical Studies courses require reflective Moodle posts that would provide relevant data. We will keep a random sampling of these posts. We also added a question to this year’s senior assessment aimed at this point.

Year Three: Discipline

Outcome #1 (“evaluation and effective use of secondary sources”)

Possible data to collect: Both comps papers and the papers in the JSP. There are also relevant assignments given in a large number of upper-level language and Classical Studies courses which we can sample.

Outcome #2 (“effective communication orally and in writing”)

Data to collect: Comps papers and the video of the comps symposium; papers from the JSP; other relevant papers. It will be possible to capture data on oral communication from class presentations as well with the use of a common rubric for evaluating these as we go.

Data sources for all outcomes: with the adoption of these new learning outcomes, we will re-write the prompt for the reflective essay that is a required component of the Junior Skills Portfolio to ask students to assess their own progress toward these goals. We would also like to add a senior exit interview (to be conducted by our department assistant), which would include questions on these six learning outcomes as well. This would provide us with two new (indirect) data sources for all six of the goals, and allow us to see the students’ sense of their progress toward them over time.