

PRACTICAL WAYS OF SAVING A CLASSICS PROGRAM:
A REPORT FROM THE FRONT

Since 1885, the University of North Dakota (UND) has provided instruction in classics. During the early years of the institution, B.A. students were required to take three years of both Latin and Greek,¹ and by the 1920s, there were two professors in classics.² When the UND switched to a major and minor system, students had three classics-related majors and three minors from which to choose: Greek, Latin and Classical Languages. But the Greek and Classical Languages majors and minors were eventually eliminated, leaving only the major and minor in Latin, and by the mid-1990s, even Latin was in peril due to lower-than-required enrollments and low numbers of graduates, endangering the very existence of classics at the University. The truth was that the Latin major and minor no longer met the needs of students, who did not want a degree that was almost entirely literature-based. This situation—which may strike readers of this journal as all too familiar—required a creative solution and the assistance of other departments. The University of North Dakota now offers a stable program in Classical Studies, which may provide a model for other institutions faced with similar challenges.

After the UND administration proposed eliminating classics from the University's curriculum, a letter-writing campaign mounted by the American Philological Association brought in countless expressions of support for the program from members of the profession at other institutions. As a consequence, the administration radically modified its course and encouraged the University's classics faculty to develop a new program that would satisfy their desiderata and rescue classics from elimination. In the late 1990s, a task force consisting of faculty from the Departments of English, History, Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures, Philosophy and Religion, and Visual Arts was formed to study the problem of classics at the UND. After much discussion, the Task Force concluded that the solution might be a flexible Classical Studies program that would draw in students more interested in classical civilization than literature, but that would nonetheless still require students to develop core competence in the Classical Languages. The new major would require 36 semes-

¹ Wilkins et al. (1983) 1.

² Wilkins et al. (1983) 3.

ter hours of coursework (11 courses), including 16 hours of Latin or Greek (4 courses) or 8 hours of both languages (4 courses), and 20 additional hours (15 upper division) selected from approved courses taught by faculty in a variety of departments listed below (7 courses). A 28-credit minor (8 courses) would be offered with the same language requirement as the major, but would require only 12 additional credits (9 upper division). For students interested in the equivalent of a traditional Latin or classics degree, upper-division literature courses in Greek and Latin would continue to be taught as needed. The Task Force and I learned many lessons about establishing a good classics program, which are summarized in the conclusion below.

In September 1998, I was hired at the UND and eventually offered a tenure-track position in Classical Studies. To our relief, the proposed new program received final approval in spring 1999, and I implemented it that fall. Later, our Department of Teaching and Learning and I collaborated with the Departments of Education and Classical Studies at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota to draft an articulation agreement to reinstate Latin teacher training at the UND so that students could take advantage of the expanding job market for Latin teachers. This agreement was approved in fall 2003. In July 2005, I completed a required comprehensive evaluation of the Classical Studies program, part of which deals with the Classical Studies faculty and a comparison of enrollment and graduation statistics for the last six years of the Latin major and minor with those for the first six of the Classical Studies major and minor. Details are furnished below.

Faculty

I am Section Coordinator of Classical Studies and the sole classicist on campus. Previously, there was one full-time and one half-time classicist; the Classical Studies program thus needed significant contributions from other faculty to be viable. Fortunately, the UND has professors in a variety of departments who either specialize or have a significant interest in some aspect of the classical world, and we have been able to turn this fact to our advantage. The program's current faculty is drawn from the Departments of Art, History, Humanities, Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures, Philosophy and Religion, and Political Science and Public Administration. In addition, in 2005 a lecturer was hired to teach one section of classical mythology every spring; this is popular both as a Classical Studies and a General Education course. The following courses approved for the Classical Studies major and minor are offered by this faculty:³

³ Cf. *Academic Catalog* (2005) 133.

Art History

- ART 210: History of Art I (3 credits)⁴

Classical Studies

- CLAS 101: First-Year Latin I (4 credits)
- CLAS 102: First-Year Latin II (4 credits)
- CLAS 151: First-Year Greek I (4 credits)
- CLAS 152: First-Year Greek II (4 credits)
- CLAS 185: Introduction to Classical Mythology (3 credits)
- CLAS 201: Second-Year Latin I (4 credits)
- CLAS 202: Second-Year Latin II (4 credits)
- CLAS 251: Second-Year Greek I (4 credits)
- CLAS 252: Second-Year Greek II (4 credits)⁵
- CLAS 301: Latin Prose (3 credits)⁶
- CLAS 362: Masterpieces of Latin Literature (3 credits)
- CLAS 364: Special Topics in Classical Literature (3 credits)⁶
- CLAS 404: Latin Poetry (3 credits)⁶
- CLAS 491: Seminar in Latin Literature (3 credits)⁴
- CLAS 494: Individual Greek and Latin Readings (1–4 credits)^{4, 5}

History

- HIST 101: Western Civilization I (3 credits)
- HIST 301: Medieval Civilization (3 credits)
- HIST 343: Ancient Greece (3 credits)
- HIST 344: Ancient Rome (3 credits)
- HIST 345: The Ancient Near East (3 credits)

Humanities

- HUM 102: Introduction to the Humanities II (4 credits)

Philosophy

- PHIL 300: Classical Greek and Hellenistic Philosophy (3 credits)
- PHIL 301: Medieval Philosophy (3 credits)

Political Science

- POLS 310: Introduction to Political Thought (3 credits)

Religion

- RELS 228: Early Christian Traditions (3 credits)
- RELS 230: New Testament (3 credits)

As will be apparent, the offerings are extensive and broad in scope, which contributes to the appeal of Classical Studies among students.

⁴ This course is not yet on the approved list in the *Academic Catalog*, but I have the authority to grant approval for it.

⁵ Repeatable to 8.

⁶ Repeatable to 9.

Classical Languages and Classical Studies: A Comparison of Enrollments

Our Office of Institutional Research kindly furnished me enrollment statistics for the Classical Languages program, under which the former Latin major and minor were offered, together with those for the new Classical Studies program. The enrollment for the last six years of the Classical Languages program varied from a high of 172 to a low of 54, the average being 111.⁷ Although the decline from 172 to 54 may at first glance appear troubling, it occurred largely due to the enormous amount of time the classics faculty spent developing the new program rather than teaching and to staffing difficulties beyond anyone's control. When I inaugurated the Classical Studies program, my most important goal was to stabilize and then increase enrollments. The enrollment for the program's first six years ranged from 77 to 128, with an average of 101.⁸ It remained steady during the first three years, but rose sharply during the last three because classical mythology, a high-enrollment course, was then offered every spring. In sum, despite the elimination of a half-time position before the inception of the Classical Studies program, the total enrollment for its first six years was 605, a decrease of only 9% from that of the last six of its predecessor. We were of course ecstatic about these results.

Latin and Classical Studies Majors and Minors Graduated: A Comparison

Both the Office of Institutional Research and the Office of the Registrar generously supplied me with graduation statistics for majors and minors in Latin and Classical Studies for the same six-year periods employed for the enrollment statistics above. As hard as they tried, my predecessors could not produce a steady number of majors and minors for the reasons described in my introductory paragraph. In six years, only 4 Latin majors and 2 minors were graduated; in stark contrast, 14 Classical Studies majors and 6 minors received degrees during the same length of time.⁹ In other words, there were 350% more majors and 300% more minors in Classical Studies than in Latin! This increase can be attributed to the strenuous efforts of my predecessors and other members of the Classical Studies Task Force to develop an excellent, flexible program responsive to students' needs, and to assertive efforts in recruiting.

⁷ Cf. Erickson (2005) 9–10 for further details.

⁸ Cf. Erickson (2005) 11–12 for further details.

⁹ Cf. Erickson (2005) 13–14 for further details.

Summary and Conclusions

In sum, the establishment of a flexible Classical Studies program in place of one in Latin was just what the UND needed. The number of majors and minors has increased markedly, and enrollments in most courses are fair to good. The Classical Studies program appears to provide all the benefits we associate with more traditional programs in classics: the program has already produced at least six students who went on to graduate training in the Humanities or education, as well as some who went into law and medicine. Our next step is to add an additional lecturer so that another section of beginning Latin can be offered each fall, which ought to have a trickle-up effect on enrollments in intermediate and advanced Latin and will hopefully give impetus to a further increase in majors and minors. If this is impossible, I will teach an extra section of beginning Latin every fall as an overload, with a consequent reduction in my research responsibilities.

To conclude, here are some suggestions for action when you discover that your classics program is in danger of elimination:

1. Don't overreact. Always maintain cordial relations with those in charge of the fate of your program.
2. Schedule a meeting with your chair to discuss the situation. Come with select letters of support from students, colleagues within your institution and members of the profession elsewhere. Include a synopsis of the highlights of these letters.
3. Reassure your chair that you will devise a plan to make your program viable and offer a tentative timetable for completing it. Keep your chair abreast of your progress.
4. Conduct surveys in your classes over sufficient time to discover the classics-related courses in which your potential majors and minors are interested and why they wish to pursue a degree in the area.
5. Form a task force of faculty within your institution who has a strong interest in some area within classics to evaluate the results of the survey and draft your Classical Studies program with this information in mind.
6. Go through the proper channels to get the new program approved. Bear in mind that you may have to compromise.
7. Once your program is approved, recruit students through such means as in-class announcements, a notice on your department's web page, meetings with students and parents at open houses and informing high school teachers in your area, region and perhaps beyond of your new program.
8. Involve all members of your Classical Studies faculty in at least some phase of the recruitment process.
9. Monitor the success of your program carefully.
10. Make adjustments, as necessary.

The situation and resources at my institution are not unique, and it seems likely that the results I have described can be duplicated elsewhere.

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