

The National Greek Exam and the Junior Classical League

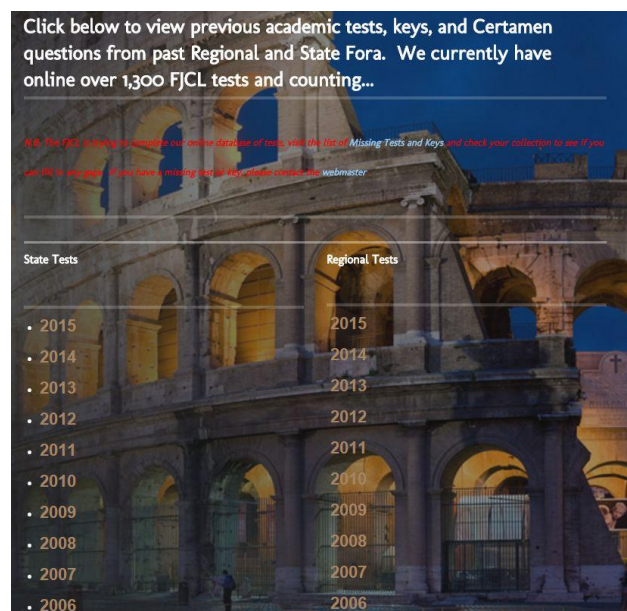
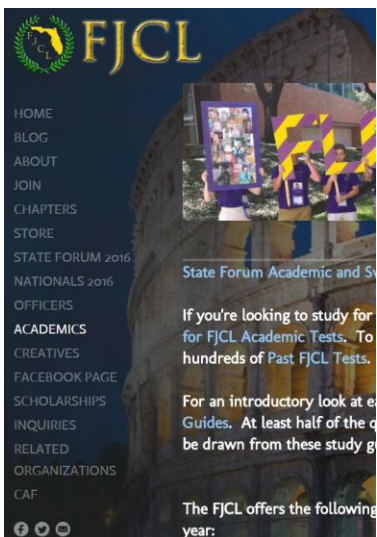
Today I am here to speak with you about two areas of opportunity for students of Greek: The National Greek Exam, and competitions within the Junior Classical League. The National Greek Exam, one of the National exams under the auspices of the American Classical League, is a reading comprehension exam administered in March. The NGE offers 6 different levels of assessment: Introduction to Greek, Beginning Attic, Intermediate Attic, Attic Prose, Attic Tragedy, and Homeric Greek. Each test has 40 multiple choice questions that primarily focus on grammar and syntax, and reading comprehension, though there are occasional English derivative questions, and the upper level exams (Attic Tragedy and Homeric) may contain Greek myth and general knowledge questions. On the non-genre specific exams, the more advanced levels presume concepts of the lower levels of the exam. Students are specifically not tested on vocabulary, so many entries are provided. Additionally, available on the National Greek Exam website (<https://aclclassics.org/pages/national-greek-exams> and <https://www.aclclassics.org/pages/ngc-syllabi>) there are exam specific syllabi which will undergo some revision this summer, along with leveled vocabulary lists for the three lower level exams, which were made available for the first time this year. Given that this is the first year of these vocabulary lists, these will likely also be revised this summer.

The numbers of this year's exam have increased slightly from past years. This year, 2379 exams have been ordered by 162 schools and universities or by students who are simply studying the language. While in the past, the Introductory level has been the most popular, the Beginning level this year has had nearly 200 more participants than its lower level counterpart. Unfortunately, the Tragedy exam had only 26 participants this

year; this seems to be a steady trend. The results of the exams are still being tallied, but will be ready by early May. Traditionally, the number of exams returned has been around 200 fewer than ordered.

Here are some general observations after having completed my first full year as the Chair of the NGE and after having submitted a survey to those who have previously offered the exam. An overwhelming number of teachers use the Athenaze program. Most participants appreciate the syllabi and are very eager for the vocabulary lists, provided that said vocabulary lists lead to a consistency of what terms are glossed on the exams. Many survey participants do not seem to understand that we are very different in terms of our scope from the National Latin Exam, for a wide variety of reasons such as consistency in methodology, sheer number of participants, and size of the committee just to name a few. It appears that there is an inherent expectation that the NGE align more closely with the NLE. I can tell you that one of our committee members is on both the NGE and the NLE, so we would have solid insight about the NLE's methodology. We certainly are considering this and will continue to evaluate whether or not we should align ourselves and, if so, how it should be accomplished. Finally, fewer than half the survey participants realized there was an opportunity for being awarded a scholarship based on their NGE scores. This is something I will work to promote better, and consider expanding to different levels of the exam. Finally, there has been a noticeable number of people requesting either a Koine/New Testament exam or a middle school variant. These are certainly ideas up for discussion, but I suspect that they are at least 3 years in the making as we would need to produce materials and consider the committee's already rigorous writing and editing schedule.

I will now turn to another set of opportunities for students of Greek, particularly those who are members of the Junior Classical League. The first is the Greek Language exam contest given at the Florida Junior Classical League State Forum in April and at the National Junior Classical League Convention in late July. This test is a very recent addition to a wide battery of academic competition exams. For the Florida JCL, this 50 question test began to be offered in 2012—Florida is the only state to have adopted this exam only because I live there and have been willing to produce the exams. For the first time since it has been offered, a second writer is willing to produce this for State Forum. At this point in time, 25-30 students have consistently taken the Greek test each year, despite many programs not including Greek in their curricula. Many students simply pick up the language as an independent study. If you would like to see the past 4 years of this exam (with keys), visit www.fjcl.org, hover over “Academics”, then over “Past FJCL Tests”, then over “State” and choose a year.



Other states have yet to adopt this type of exam at their own competitive Fora, but I hope that the availability of the Greek Language exam as a contest at National JCL will encourage it. At the NJCL, the Greek Language exam is 100 questions and approximately 120 students have taken it each year. The newly elected Academic Coordinator of the NJCL plans to start counting the Greek Language exam at the National level for Sweepstakes points—which means the test will be considered a standard, competitive element in achieving an overall high score for individual students. Both of these tests offer only one form, but when students take them, they are scored only against other students in their level of Latin. This is an inherent flaw in the scoring program. For example, a third year Greek student who is taking Latin for the first time would be scored against a first year Latin and first year Greek student. The spreadsheet and scantron programs that have been developed for both of these competitions can only register the year of one language, not both or independently.

Finally, I would like to talk about the last opportunity for Greek and the students of the Classics, a buzzer game called “Agon”. This game is based on Certamen, a quiz bowl or college bowl type game for teams of up to four players. The basic play of the game is that a Toss Up question is read, and a player buzzes in to answer. Each individual Toss Up is followed by two *boni*, or bonus questions that are answered as a team. A round of Agon usually consists of 15 or 20 questions with a mix of Greek language, mythology, history and life, and literature categories that have a specific percentage breakdown. Within Florida, we’ve set up Agon as league-style play: at each Certamen tournament, there has been one round of Agon offered, also with great success in terms of participation. At NJCL, Agon was played as an exhibition for the first time in 2013, and

it was given an official time slot to play two years ago, where we had 24 teams—that is nearly 100 students—playing three preliminary rounds, a semi final and a round of finals. Unfortunately, at last year’s NJCL, Agon was not renewed. The student officers of the organization did offer a Greek and Hellenic based trivia game using the platform Kahoot, which allows your cell phone to operate as a “clicker”, but it was not well attended. Many students and teachers asked for the return of Agon at the 2016 NJCL Convention, but it does not look like it will be added to the program.

The ultimate goal of these Greek Language exams and of Agon is to provide a competitive element for students of Greek at conventions which have traditionally been very Latin heavy. I hope that by giving Greek a spotlight on a competitive stage like JCL, more students will be encouraged to approach it, independently or formally. I hope that those students who have already begun their Greek study will find a sense of accomplishment and achievement by taking the National Greek Exam, so that they can see how much they really have learned. While it is disappointing that Agon will not be played at the national level this year, it is heartening to know that the NGE will be given some time during one of the assemblies to report the results, acknowledge participants, and recognize award winners. I am hopeful that this small but important bit of publicity will help bolster NGE numbers and give Greek its due in the Junior Classical League world.

Thank you for your time.