

Moneyball Classics? Dynamic Reflections for Those Fresh Out of Grad School

For those of us who are familiar with the “Moneyball” model—concisely put by Brad Pitt’s character in a recent film of that same name, “Buying runs”—it might seem absurd and even undignified to map that paradigm onto the schema of the Academy. We are, after all, researchers, we are scholars of the highest order, and we have been trained at world-class, “Carnegie II” universities. “So,” someone might well think, “don’t dare come to us with talk of enrollments, encouraging students to consider taking more Latin, or opening sections of Latin beyond what is our wont.”

Fair enough. Yet it wasn’t that long ago that Presenter #3 was a graduate student finishing my PhD, helping Lowell Edmunds and Phyllis Culham edit a volume entitled, *Classics: A Discipline and Profession in Crisis*. That tome consisted of essays describing the state of the profession of Classics in the 1980s and, in a nutshell, the outlook was not good. The profession had been shrinking and suffering from the twain illnesses of elitism (whether merely perceived or actually justified) and budget-cuts. I learned a lot from editing that volume: what I learned was that to make a strikingly successful program you need to be ready to engage in what we might call “Moneyball classics.”

What I mean by “strikingly successful” is a program that doesn’t just rely on in-translation classes to justify its existence, but actually can do so with hard numbers in Greek and Latin. Yet I had to shake off an image that I had conjured in my mind: I had entered graduate school and maintained through graduate school the notion of the Classics professor sipping brandy as he (for in those days more often than not they were males) pondered a particularly puzzling passage of Plato, a nearly unintelligible (but no less delightful) verse of Pindar, or

considered, one by one, the verbs in the half-lines of the *Aeneid*. I had no idea how shockingly busy I would be as a lecturer, then as an assistant professor, and so on. I just assumed that the life of a professor was, for lack of a better word, peaceful.

Editing the volume mentioned above, however, showed me a different side to the profession, a more real side. In many ways, Classics is just like all the other disciplines: we have to justify our existence in the Academy not based on tradition but on relevance. And, as far as administrators are concerned, relevance is largely measured by numbers—numbers of students in a class, numbers of majors, numbers of publications, numbers of refereed conference papers, etc. In short, administrators are largely interested in “buying runs.” And to those same administrators, “runs” are the very things I just listed.

So, then, what is my advice to a new generation of PhDs hitting hard a very tough job market? I’m not sure, but *Moneyball* will be part of the answer. With these remarks I would like to open a dialogue for ample questions, not just directed to me but also to others in the audience, that we might reflect and respond from our various vantage points. Let’s put our heads together to use the current market downturn to make the profession better across the board by creative thinking and diligent work in our scholarship, exciting and dynamic teaching and program building, at whatever college or university we may be and for however long we may be scheduled to be there. I believe we can, as a group, put Classics as a discipline on a firmer foundation that it has been. To do that we must be prepared to work harder than ever. It is not the case that merely our own jobs depend upon this kind of mentality; the next generation of students, eager to love the books and civilizations that we love, is counting on us.