

THE EFFECTIVE CLASSICS DEPARTMENT

The panelists hail from a range of institutions and departments and possess varying kinds of administrative experience. They will describe the challenges facing various kinds of departments and offer some strategies to meet those challenges.

I. Classics and the Heartbeat of a University

In 1979, in response to a ruling by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia that every program in a state college or university graduate a certain number of students each year, various disciplines across what was then Mary Washington College banded together to form larger departments, hence increasing their chances of attaining the requisite quota and of preserving their individual majors. Classics had the opportunity to join either with the various modern foreign languages or with Philosophy and Religion. While there are several departments of classical and modern languages across the United States, the combination of Classics, Philosophy, and Religion remains rare.

Yet, the decision to join forces with Philosophy and Religion turned out to be a very good one for Classics at Mary Washington. As is usual in the discipline, we teach a number of courses in translation—civilization, mythology, epic, tragedy, women in antiquity, and so on—in addition to language and literature courses in Latin and Greek. These numerous courses in translation give us at least as much in common with Philosophy and Religion as we would have had with Spanish, French, and the other modern languages, which teach few non-language courses.

Further, the disciplines of Classics, Philosophy, and Religion overlap well: Classics students take courses on ancient Greek philosophy from the Philosophy faculty and ones on early Christianity from the Religion faculty; Philosophy students fulfilling the pre-law concentration are required to take courses in Latin; and Religion students take the Classics course on Greek and Roman religion. Philosophy students particularly interested in Plato and Aristotle and Religion students planning to attend seminary take ancient Greek, while faculty members in Philosophy and Religion with research interests in the ancient world often teach the elementary and intermediate sequence for ancient Greek. These faculty members also sometimes offer courses in Sanskrit, Coptic, and New Testament Greek, all of which are counted towards the Classics major.

Classics, Philosophy, and Religion at Mary Washington wanted to be a single, integrated—though multi-disciplinary—department in more than name only, so early on it developed a course, CPRD 299: *Mysterium Humanum*, which counts as an elective in all three of its separate majors. One faculty member takes charge of the course, picking a topic of enduring concern, such as death, time, sex, slavery, or power, and arranges for each faculty member in the department, as well as some guest speakers from other departments and beyond, to give a public lecture on that theme. The public lecture series then becomes part of the course. The result has been the kind of interdisciplinary experience that any liberal arts institution should offer to its students and the campus and community at large. Truly, the blending of Classics, Philosophy, and Religion, fondly abbreviated as the “Dept. of CPR,” has turned out to be an entity that promotes a healthy heartbeat for the goals of the University of Mary Washington.

II. Integrating Classics into the Honors College: The Louisiana Scholars' College at Northwestern State University

For classics to be effective in an honors college, it has to be able to integrate into the curriculum in four ways: as a required part of the core curriculum, as an option for meeting the language requirement, as support for major studies in areas such as history, literature, and philosophy, and provide a major that will prepare students for teaching or graduate work.

When the Louisiana Scholars' College was established in 1987, the founding faculty decided that classics would be an essential part of the core curriculum, so that all students would have a strong grounding in the beginnings of Western civilization. Every freshman takes a course called "Texts and Traditions I" which focuses on the Greco-Roman world. The course is team-taught by a classicist and a medievalist, with a number of other faculty supplying guest-lectures. That the course is required of all freshmen gives them classics as a common language and an ability to see the influence of the classical world on later ages.

Offering Latin and Greek as options—in addition to Spanish, French, and German—allows students who have come in contact with the ancient texts in the core curriculum to learn more about the ancient civilizations through language study. The difficulty classics faces, however, is the utilitarian view of many students: that they will be able to use Spanish, in particular. To be effective requires targeting certain students and selling the value of learning the ancient language.

Majors such as history, English, art, and philosophy require support courses from classics in order to provide students with a well-rounded major curriculum. The varying demands of the different disciplines require a breadth and flexibility on the part of the classics faculty, especially in a small honors college with one and a half classicists and a medievalist who teaches some courses in the ancient world.

For the classics/Latin/Greek major to be effective in an honors curriculum, it has to prepare students for a variety of post-graduate options. The challenge comes in providing a broad curriculum with limited faculty resources. In addition, the inevitable independent studies also take an additional toll on the faculty resources.

The demands of a comprehensive honors curriculum in a small honors college require that all faculty work closely together to provide mutual support for all of the curriculum options. For classics to be effective in such an environment, it is essential for faculty to be flexible and to take the time to educate colleagues as well as the students on the value of the classical education.

This paper will use the example of the Scholars' College to show how a small classics program can make effective contributions to an honors curriculum.

III. Strategies for Success at a Non-Flagship Research University

This paper will talk about how a small department can be pro-active and grow in the context of a large university whose interests are often directed towards the sciences and other areas outside the humanities. The department at UNC Greensboro had two members in 1900, added a third in 1971 and a fourth in 1984. Since that time we have added new lines more rapidly and now have 7 tenured/tenure-track faculty and 2 full-time visiting/lecturer lines, with part-time positions as needed.

Topics to be discussed will include structuring the curriculum, finding a niche, working with the Dean's Office, and the importance of doing one's homework.

IV. The Effective Classics Department: Internal and External Perspectives

There are different ways to define the effective Classics department. I view effectiveness from two perspectives: internal and external. From the perspective internal to the department, an effective department delivers effective, high quality teaching, research, service (in whatever measure those are important to your institution). The department does this in a way that produces well trained and thoughtful students and achieves measurable successes in the other areas. From the perspective external to the department, effectiveness involves surviving and thriving with respect to the administration and other external constituencies.

There is no optimum single model for success. We all function in different types of institutions and encounter different impediments and advantages. Here are four tactics for achieving this goal.

- Be good
- Be well behaved
- Be strategic
- Be integrated