

## Lantern Slides and Lecture Halls: An Examination of the Evolution of Classical Education at the University of Iowa

For hundreds of years, beginning in the Renaissance, the study of ancient Greece and Rome, as well as ancient Greek and Latin language studies, were employed along with the study of modern languages, science, politics, rhetoric, and mathematics, to develop the mind (Oakman, 1893:324). Classical studies were hailed as one of the surest signs of someone being highly educated, and inspired philosophical and political dogma, allowed people to engage with holy texts and other primary sources, and even reinvigorated ancient art styles. Nevertheless, beginning in the mid-18th century and continuing through today, many claim that the discipline has declined and lost its value and relevance in education, and nostalgically look back to earlier centuries to a “Golden Age” when Classical education was so deeply intertwined with what it meant to be “educated” (Lloyd-Jones, 1970:219, Wright [1], 1889:77-80, Wright [2], 1889:223). By the 19th century, some scholars were publishing their laments on the gradual decline of the field over the previous century such as in Oakman’s 1893 article “The History of Classical Education” written for *The Journal of Education*, where he publicly grieves, “the tendency among schools... to still further diminish the time given to classical study”. It is very simple to create a narrative of decline when only looking at the big picture, which might include the increased prominence of other non-humanistic studies, reduced funding for Classics departments, and declining enrollment for Classics-specific programs. While it is important to understand that picture to determine the overall health of the discipline, by looking at smaller case studies throughout the history of the field, we gain insights into the discipline’s relevance and what it looks like in practice. These insights then allow us to determine what a successful practice looks like (increased funding, enrollment, relevance, etc.), and what we can do to ensure future

success. With that in mind, I researched archival educational materials from the Classics Department at the University of Iowa and compared them to how I was educated almost one hundred years later, and found that the case study complicates this very cut-and-dry narrative of decline. My research demonstrates that instead of deteriorating, Classical education has adapted to modern educational needs. In the late 19th and early 20th-centuries, when the university was still known as the State University of Iowa, they established and maintained an Extension Division that allowed them to distribute lessons on topics typically only offered at institutions of higher education to students all over Iowa, such as those in high schools and community colleges (Bass, 1943:50). The Extension Division's offerings were broad and included (but were not limited to) lessons on mathematics, city planning, education, engineering, and most notably, Classics. The lessons were often distributed as rentable lecture booklets and lantern slides for teachers to use in their classrooms, and even though the Extension Division closed in 1940, some materials still exist today (Bass, 1943:58,66). Fourteen sets of slides and lecture pamphlets relating to Classical studies from the Extension Division survive in the University of Iowa's Classics library, and they provide priceless insights into what topics, images, areas, and individuals were viewed as "valuable" to teach as a part of Classical education approximately one hundred years ago. Based on the lesson contents, they also highlight what kinds of evidence were considered satisfactory to use to make conclusions about ancient Mediterranean cultures. However, in comparing these lessons from the Extension Division to what I have learned in Classical studies and how I was taught today, it is evident that the discipline has changed over time. Modern Classical education examines the ancient world through a cultural lens, and includes studies on socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic identities, and feminist and queer theory. These hundred-year-old lessons presented in the slides tend to focus more on sensational, well-

known stories and “great man narratives”. But even more significantly, the discipline continues to exist. My paper will discuss how this case study can be used as one form of evidence that this long-lived field is evolving and can continue to productively evolve.

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