

Flipping Latin at Big State University

In a rapidly changing and increasingly technology-dependent world, instructors in higher education are often confronted with challenges and opportunities unfamiliar to their predecessors of only twenty years ago. Students and instructors have instant access to more and better information than ever before. Ebooks, Youtube, video conferencing, and online research databases allow modern students to learn many subjects with little more than their smart phone. While the internet provides nearly unlimited learning potential, most students flooding into universities are more familiar with checking their phones than checking out library books, creating an inherent divide between how most subjects have been traditionally taught and how today's student is acculturated to learning.

One of many disciplines being left behind in the digital age is Classics. Though Classicists argue ardently for the value of Latin and Greek to a modern education, the study of Latin in both secondary and higher education has declined severely since the 1920s, a situation which some say may not be easily remedied (Holliday). This decline may be due to the teaching practices of Classics departments which have changed very little over the decades. Most instructors teach the way they were taught (Mazur), and because Latin has been a core subject for far longer than the printed book, a lecture introducing grammatical concepts followed by translation homework after class is a widely accepted pedagogical model for those schools and universities which continue to offer Latin (Mazur; Geller-Goad). This sage-on-the-stage model "assumes that the student's brain is like an empty container into which the professor pours knowledge," a paradigm which may have worked well in a world where professionals in most fields were required merely to regurgitate and apply knowledge (King 30). However, in the

twenty-first century, most careers require students not only to recall but manipulate knowledge, reorganize it, and use it to come up with new and innovative ideas (Berret, Bogos).

By continuing to teach with an older pedagogical model, classicists continually undervalued the potential impact and value of their own subject. Latin's most useful addition to education comes not just from vocabulary growth or understanding of grammar but also its unique ability to teach students how to think, a marketable quality in the twenty-first century job market (King 30). By learning to understand a language which functions so differently from their own, students who study Latin learn the importance of extracting meaning from small details, communicating effectively, and understanding their own culture against the backdrop of the ancient world (Gruber-Miller 3-4).

To meet the needs of these new, millennial students, our program has turned to the "flipped classroom," one of the last decade's most successful educational experiments. We have attempted to harness the capabilities of the information age to improve the quality of beginning language classes and provided an essential initial step toward raising the quality of Latin education and opening the door to students anywhere in the world. By creating a series of online materials and restructuring the course to meet the needs of modern students, this "flipped" curriculum offers the opportunity to make Latin a relevant part of higher education for many years to come.

After a full year of testing, our flipped Latin program has proven a remarkable success. Every day the flipped classroom provided a positive learning experience, improved student attendance, and helped several students succeed who may not have in a traditional program. By the end of beta testing in Spring 2015, students gave the flipped program a perfect rating of five out of five on the IDEA course evaluation. They themselves said it best, calling LATN 1020 "by

far the most influential class I'll ever take" and "one of the best experiences of my life both in and out of academia."

Bibliography

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