Testing Classical Languages and Culture in the 21st Century

As teachers and professors, tests have been as much a part of our lives as reading, writing, and breathing. Most of us had K-12 teachers who had nearly complete freedom to set their own curriculum and make up their own tests. We then took college classes with two exams, midterm and final, which constituted at least two-thirds of the course grade. As we became instructors, we came to believe that more was better, and began to offer more frequent tests with lower stakes, although many of us had to conform to a variety of outside influences in setting any evaluations of our students, whether or not we believed that they were in our students' best interest.

What we teach in Classics courses, particularly in courses on classical languages, has changed very little over the past century, but the changing climate of education, and the introduction of various technologies, should make us consider how we test students' knowledge. Among these changes are:

- Extensive standardized testing in K-12 education;

- Online and hybrid teaching, as well as the pressure to use digital equipment in teaching;

- New research into cognition and retention of information;

- Inclusion of students with disabilities in K-12 and universities;

- The information age and ready access to information;

- The increasing requirements of program/learning assessment imposed on instructors

There is, of course, a strong interrelationship between what we teach, how we teach it, and how then we assess students' learning of the course content. Ideally, tests should be perfectly aligned with course learning outcomes, so that program assessment can be based on

data gathered from individual student performance on classroom tests without the need to impose further assessment instruments such as standardized tests.

A broad conversation about teaching among teachers of Classics will also serve another purpose. Educational administrators tend not to understand why classicists teach differently than teachers of modern languages and cultures. Research into appropriate testing methods will, hopefully, encourage the use of best practices and also an "industry standard" which could be used to prove that any particular program is generally in alignment with others.

In this panel, we will address language testing at both the high school and college levels. We will also discuss constructing and proctoring tests for an online college culture class. Finally, an expert in education will address current theories of assessment and how those might be applied in Classics courses. We hope that this panel will encourage participants to examine their own tests, and to consider conducting quantitative research into student outcomes.