Lessons from a Competency-Based Online Greek Course

In Summer 2017, I piloted a fully online, asynchronous first-year Greek program at my four-year university. This was part of a multi-pronged strategy aimed at shoring up low Greek enrollments, particularly in second-year courses. The first year included four students, all from other universities, and was a qualified success. I offered the course again in Summer 2018, this time to a total of 15 students, the majority of whom are our students, and again was largely successful. In this paper I will present a number of lessons related to the design, success, and outcomes of this course.

First I will outline the format and design of the course. I will begin briefly with the technological format and, at somewhat more length, with the competency-based design of the course, which allows students to proceed through the course at their own speed, practicing as much or as little as necessary to achieve success. The course is designed so that completing assignments releases video answer keys for the assignment. Demonstrating mastery by scoring 100% on a "quick quiz" at the end of each chapter unlocks the next chapter. I will demonstrate the format of these automatically graded quizzes, which are often quite different from traditional in-person quizzes, with a focus on conceptual understanding rather than memorization.

After discussing the course itself, I will share the ways in which the course has contributed to a significant improvement in enrollment numbers, bucking both national and university trends. The course has thus far seen exponential growth and attracted students from both our own university and beyond. Beyond the course's success, there has been a significant snowball effect, allowing for increased majors and minors, and increased word of mouth that leads to still more growth.

Finally, I will lay out some of the ways that the successes (and limitations) of this course have encouraged me to reconsider the design and nature of our traditional in-person courses taught during the academic year. In particular, the competency-based approach provides a tantalizing model for re-thinking our language classes. All too often in a traditional course, a student fails to master a concept due to absence, lack of practice, or some other cognitive block. As the course rolls on, that lack of competency compounds and prevents them from successfully mastering subsequent concepts. Although implementing such a system remains challenging, competency-based courses can provide stimulating alternatives to the traditional classroom.

This presentation will both share my current pedagogical practices, which are rarely used in Greek and Latin language pedagogy, and use those practices to reflect upon the pedagogical values and practices of our classrooms more generally. As such, it will be of interest both to those who wish to implement a competency-based online class of their own and those who wish to consider ways in which we can create more flexible, supportive and successful language classrooms more broadly.