

Engaging High School Students in Scholarship: Unedited Neo-Latin Manuscripts

The purpose of this workshop is to promote high school student engagement in research and scholarship by highlighting one particular project, in which secondary-level students produced transcriptions and translations of previously unedited Latin texts. In the first portion of the workshop, the presider will explain the topic, goals, and methods of this student research project, followed by a question-and-answer period. Then several individual students who took part in the project will give short papers outlining their experience, what they found, and what they learned, followed by another question and answer period. Workshop attendees can expect to come away with an understanding of the pedagogical benefits of having high school students engage in scholarship, as well as an understanding of how to structure and develop such projects.

High school teachers should be thinking of ways to find opportunities for students to contribute to scholarship, just as humanities professors have been increasingly doing over the last twenty years. The benefits of student engagement in research are high: students are motivated by the opportunity to make a contribution to the world outside the classroom; students also take a more active, purposeful role in their own learning when given real responsibility for an intellectual project; finally, students get a chance to apply their knowledge by getting to try their hands at the same work that scholars do. It is true that high school students lack the philological preparation of graduate and undergraduate students, yet with the proper scaffolding they can make genuine contributions to scholarship.

For our project, we created transcriptions and translations of previously unedited Latin manuscripts, with a goal of making them available to interested scholars on a public-facing website. We used digitized manuscripts from the Pullen Collection at the University of William

and Mary, which contains Latin documents related to the reign of the King William III (r. 1689-1702). As a supplemental project to their regular Latin coursework, each student was assigned a single document, most of which were one-to-two page letters to or from King William. Students created transcriptions of their documents in the fall semester and translations in the spring. Their work involved paleography (to read the document) and basic historical research (to understand its context), but the bulk of the labor was simply to act as a philological detective and try to make sense of a never-before-translated Latin document.

There are many possibilities for interested teachers to develop similar projects for their students. Indeed, there is an ocean of unedited Latin manuscripts, especially of works from the Neo-Latin period (roughly 1400-1800). These works often have high literary quality and historical value, yet they have not received the same scholarly attention as ancient Latin works. Few classicists read them because they are modern, few modernists read them because they are in Latin. Many manuscripts of these works have now been digitized and are available online. Our workshop will outline how to find such manuscripts and how similar projects might be structured.

In order to demonstrate both the benefits of this research to students, and the benefits to the scholarly world, our workshop will include four short (five-to-seven minute) presentations by students. The first will explain the details of the transcription process, the obstacles encountered, and what they learned as a Latinist. The second will do the same for the translation process. The third and fourth students will outline some of the major findings from these historical artifacts.