

Annual Departmental Assessment Report

Department or Program: Classics

Academic Year of Report: 2018-2019

Department Contact Person for Assessment: M. Jaeger

Section 1: Learning Objectives Assessed for this Report

For each major in the department, list the learning objectives that were assessed during this period.

For this round of assessment we chose to look at one of the service courses, CLAS 301, Ancient Greek and Roman Epic. The major objective for the service courses is here described:

An understanding of literature, art, and other artifacts from the cultures of the Greco-Roman world, and the capacity to situate them in their socio-historical context, to identify, interpret, and discuss them, and to describe their later influence. Key aspects of these cultures include philosophy, political theory, rhetoric, theatre, art, archaeology, historiography, poetry, and religion.

This report focuses on literature. Future reports will focus on the understanding of art and other artifacts, other service courses, and further studies of language skill attainment.

Section 2: Assessment Activities

Understanding ancient epic (here interpreted as Greco-Roman and focusing on the most influential examples: *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, *Aeneid*), demands a number of reading and interpretive skills. To begin with the most basic: understanding epic requires a large vocabulary to begin with but also the ability (including the willingness) to expand that vocabulary; it requires furthermore, amassing a body of knowledge about names and nomenclature; then, it requires developing the ability to comprehend a form of narrative that begins *in medias res*, moves between the human and divine sphere, finds structure in ring composition on both the small and large scale; pushes major events beyond the temporal margins of the work itself (e.g., the fall of Troy, the founding of Rome) but manages to make those events weigh heavily on the entire work, and, a form of narrative that—to take the *Iliad* as an example—in a work focused on war, brings in the world of peace *via simile* and ekphrasis (and students have to learn what simile and ekphrasis are as well).

One means of assessing student comprehension is the frequent reader response essay. Some of these take place in class, others are posted on CANVAS. Students are given a passage or a fairly tightly focused question to discuss in a short format (usually no more than 250 words).

Another means: the final essay question looks specifically at “*to describe their later influence*” by asking students to discuss in detail how having read the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* influences their comprehension of the *Aeneid*. (It is one way in which they can approach sharing the experience of ancient readers of Vergil who would have been familiar with both Homeric epics).

The same instructor taught this course in spring 2018 and fall 2019; while this is not strictly the 2018-2019 academic year (a sabbatical fell between the two occurrences), following two iterations taught by a single instructor limits the variables involved.

Section 3: Actions Taken Based on Assessment Analysis

The second round of teaching this class used more reading response essays. This increased the number of low-stakes assignments substantially. There was an increase (11%) in the number of students receiving a grade in the A and B range. The impression on the instructor's part was that the students had an easier time writing their papers because of the practice they had had as well as the opportunity to expand one of the low-stakes responses into a longer paper.

The next time will grade them more strictly.

Section 4: Other Efforts to Improve the Student Educational Experience

*Specifically in CLAS 301: Students appreciated being offered opportunities to engage with the text in different ways (for their final projects, some wrote a chapter of a graphic novel, others composed the 25th book of the Odyssey; they could read and discuss some of the recent, fiction that has given voices to epic characters who have been mostly silent (Madeleine Miller's *The Song of Achilles*, *Circe*; Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*).*

Outside of class: students are invited to all Classics department sponsored talks and events. In addition to the three talks put on by the local chapter of the Archeological Institute of America, the Classics department sponsors two-three talks a year on its own, and partners with History, Art History, Religious Studies, Medieval Studies and the Humanities program on others.

Section 5: Plans for Next Year

1) Work with Tykeson advisors so that they can communicate the challenges and rewards of classics to potential majors. 2) Reinstitute the annual field trip (the goal of such a trip is contingent on what is on at e.g., Ashland, OMSI, or Portland Museum of Art. Next fall's trip will be to the Hallie Ford Museum at Willamette in Salem. 3) Reinstitute the Classics Club, which suffered burnout two years ago from doing too much. 4) Figure out a way to expand our departmental teaching and discussion of Greek theater, especially tragedy.