

Response of the Department of Classics to the Review Committee Report

19 April 2019

The faculty, staff, and graduate students of the Department of Classics are deeply grateful to the members of the Review Committee: Associate Professor Barbara Henry (UW Slavic Department), Associate Professor Stuart Lingo (UW Division of Art History) and the two external members, Professor John Marincola (Classics, Florida State) and Professor Kathryn Morgan (Classics, UCLA). It is clear that they gave the task considerable care and thought. We appreciate the Committee's acknowledgement of the reputation of this Department, and its affirmation that we remain among the 'leading departments in the field' (p. 2). At the same time, we also appreciate the recognition that the 'rhetoric of crisis' (p. 4) expressed in our Self-Study is not exaggerated. The Department is at an important and critical juncture, and we believe that the review process has not only helped focus our attention on how to address effectively the challenges we face, but also (and perhaps most importantly) focused the administration's attention on the size and gravity of those challenges.

There is no need for us to discuss here the many positive aspects of the Department highlighted in the report. We will instead speak briefly to the 'Challenges' described by the committee, which largely mirror those we identify in the Self-Study; and then address the several very useful recommendations offered.

With respect to the challenges, there is one in particular we would like to stress: the committee's finding that the current state of ASE funding in the Department is dire, a finding with which we could not agree more. This is a point made repeatedly in the Self-Study. We are fully aware that we cannot maintain a graduate program of this standing without offering multiyear funding packages, and at a minimum those must be five-year packages. Division-topping credit-hour enrollments notwithstanding, we have suffered sharp reductions in ASE funding, from ca. 37 ASE quarters per year in 2008-09 to ca. 20 ASE quarters now, caused by rising stipends that have not been matched with increases in our funding allotment. Despite this, we have been able, through judicious deployment of the fellowship funding available to us through various endowments, to sustain the five-year level of funding — but at the non-sustainable cost of reducing graduate admissions to two or even just one new student per year. Not only can this not continue, but of necessity the size of our graduate program will likely decrease more than it already has and with it the number of courses we are able to offer and the student credit hours we are able to generate at a time when demand for the department's courses, as the Report (p. 4) notes, is 'exceptional.' This issue has ramifications not only for the Department but, as the report suggests, for the College and even the University.

Indeed, many of the challenges described in the Self-Study and reiterated in the Review Report may be traced back to issues of ASE funding and support, including threats to our ability to maintain the superlative reputation we have enjoyed for decades.

The committee offered several recommendations at the departmental level (p. 6). Some of these recommendations point to issues of which we are already cognizant and are working to address; and in most cases, at least part of the solution lies in increased ASE funding. Other recommendations bring to light issues that were not generally apparent to all of us but clearly

need to be addressed. Here are our responses to each of the Report's numbered recommendations to the Department:

- (1) Classics 430 (Greek and Roman Mythology). One of our most popular and largest classes, Classics 430 exists as both a 5-credit and 3-credit version. We have not been able to offer the 5-credit version regularly, because it requires ASEs, and given the demand for ASEs in other classes, we have not often been able to allocate them to a 5-credit Classics 430 class. While we believe there continues to be a place for the 3-credit version, we are hoping to offer this class in both versions more regularly in the coming years because student demand is so high. In fact, this quarter (Spring Quarter '19) we were able to offer both a 5-credit and a 3-credit version, with both classes filling instantly. It is likely we will continue to do this in the future, if we can count on the ASE slots to do so (the present quarter's opportunity came from a one-time circumstance).
- (2) The Committee recommends reallocating ASEs away from our popular Classics 101 and Classics 205 classes, which are taught solely by ASEs. Similarly, it is recommended that we consider redeveloping both of these classes as online classes (see next section, #3). The future of these two classes has been the subject of discussion among the faculty for some time, and we are wrestling with whether or how best to reconfigure them. We already teach far fewer sections of both classes than we did a decade ago. Since this issue bears directly on not only how best to utilize our ASEs, but their professional development and training as well, this must and will be on our agenda moving forward.
- (3) With respect to putting these and other courses online, this too has been discussed in a very preliminary way, especially as a possible means of support and a valuable experience for graduate students. The chief obstacles remain time and expertise: developing an online class requires both considerable time and labor on the part of the faculty member who will create the curriculum, and unless we are able to count such development as part of the regular teaching load of the faculty member, it is not feasible to require a faculty member to take this task on as an overload (Classics 430, for instance, used to be offered through what was called Distance Learning but the faculty instructor was compensated separately for what was considered an overload and was assigned to a development team that helped create and oversee the class). And then there is the question of the technical expertise needed to put a course online. A couple of faculty members have in fact already been in contact with an online course designer here at the University, so we should shortly have a better sense of how to proceed. In this connection, it is encouraging to see that in exit discussions with the Review Committee, representatives of the administration suggested it might be possible to supply funding for the design and support of online classes. Rest assured that this is a prospect we shall pursue!
- (4) The committee has suggested we institute a 'program of ongoing faculty development and support for Assistant and Associate Professors', in the interests of 'complete transparency...in tenure and promotion' (p. 6). This is a particularly useful piece of information, and one we trust the new chair in concert with the senior faculty will address in very short order.
- (5) The report suggests the creation of a 'teaching proseminar' for our ASEs. Currently, each course taught or assisted by ASEs has a faculty supervisor, who is responsible for both conducting an orientation at the beginning of the year and supervising the teaching

of the class. At the same time, all departmental ASEs are encouraged to attend the TA Conference offered by the Center for Teaching and Learning each September.

Admittedly, neither is a substitute for a class devoted to teaching in the discipline. While it is not entirely clear what a ‘teaching proseminar’ might look like or how the logistics of it would work, this is nonetheless an idea we will take under advisement.

Beyond these, the Review Committee offers a number of recommendations at the College and University level. For the most part, it is not within the Department’s power to address these recommendations. Here too we enthusiastically second their suggestions. In particular, however, we would draw attention to the threats to the department posed by several looming retirements, one of which (Ruby Blondell) will occur at the end of this academic year. Within the next five years, it is likely that three senior members will have retired. (One correction in passing: the Review Committee reported Professor Hinds’ proposed retirement year as 2022, but this should read 2024.)

There is one issue we wish had garnered some attention in the Committee report, which is of concern not only to the Department of Classics but to all language departments at the University of Washington, and that is the change to the language requirement implemented in 2009. At several points in our Self-Study we drew attention to the deleterious effect this has had on enrollments in Latin and Greek, as it has on language classes across the College. As is true of most of our colleagues in other units, we feel this change was ill-advised. We are encouraged by signs that the administration is poised to revisit the issue, but it is important that we record our continuing concern.

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