

Undergraduate Council Report on the Department of Ancient Studies

Draft prepared by Steven Young (MLLI), March 9, 2016

Introduction

Over the period of review, 2009–14, the department saw its entire full-time faculty (five associate professors and one lecturer) retire. There is now only one tenured and one tenure-track faculty member; most of the teaching load is carried by lecturers and adjuncts. This period also saw the number of majors decline by over half, from a high of 53 in 2009–10 to 25 in 2014–15, reflecting a downward trend nationally in enrollments for Greek and Latin. The department, which is described by the external reviewers as “proactive and forward-looking,” is addressing these issues.

A. Student Learning Outcomes

The department has identified seven learning goals for students in its programs; these goals include a range of proficiencies and critical abilities in language, literature, and archaeology. A number of these have been incorporated into student assessment for four courses, in two of which priority is given to monitoring and evaluating students’ academic writing.

B. State of the Discipline; Program modifications; Program changes

Since the establishment of the Ancient Studies department, the discipline has become increasingly interdisciplinary, drawing upon advances in anthropology, archaeology, and history, as well as technologies which make possible new readings and interpretations of ancient texts. Reflecting these changes, the department considers its archaeology, history, and literature courses to be state-of-the-art, and its civilization courses reasonably up-to-date. No major programmatic changes have been introduced since the last review.

The department sees a need for new courses in literature, socio-economic and cultural history, and reception, with an expansion to one or more near-eastern languages and specialization in the material culture and history of Near-Eastern political and cultural centers; it is hoped that such updates in the curriculum will help attract and retain new majors. The department also acknowledges the rather flat progression of courses in its major track, and plans to introduce more specialized courses for majors at the 400 level, including a capstone course.

C. Undergraduate Curriculum

The department offers three major tracks, all of which provide a broad, coherent, and interdisciplinary introduction to the ancient world: Option I (42 credits), Option II (45 credits; the most popular track), and Honors (69 credits). The three tracks share a nine-credit core, which includes courses in civilization, archaeology, and history; a language component, with varying levels of achievement depending on the track (the Honors track is the most rigorous here, requiring advanced levels of either Latin or Greek, and at least a 201-level in the other language); nine credits of upper-level electives; and 9-15 credits of open electives. Most of the program’s majors are double-majors or transfer students, who benefit from the flexibility afforded by the relatively large proportion of electives. Most of the department’s graduates have gone on to post-graduate programs, including law school.

The department also offers a minor, in which students choose courses from three of the following categories: civilization, archaeology, history, and Greek or Latin language.

Many of the department's courses, including upper-level courses, have a range of GEP designations (AH, SS, or C), making them attractive for non-majors and providing a solid contribution to the university's general education requirements.

D. Research Opportunities for Undergraduates

The department actively promotes URCAD opportunities for its students. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of students participating in URCAD; most of the presenters were mentored by lecturers. A number of Ancient Studies majors have had their findings published in the *UMBC Review*. The department's majors have a range of opportunities for study and travel abroad, participation in internships, field schools, and archaeological digs. The department typically awards \$12,000 per year to subsidize travel for five students.

E. Undergraduate Advisement

In an effort to protect faculty with heavy teaching and research loads, the chair currently advises the majority of the department's majors and minors (approximately 25 each semester). A student who prefers a faculty member other than the chair is free to change advisors. Advisement within the department is not limited to a review of academic progress, but includes discussions of career goals, opportunities for funded travel, internships, and conference presentations. Student mentoring also takes place on an informal basis.

F. Council of Majors; Undergraduate Honors; Awards; Recognition

Ancient Studies has an active Council of Majors, which organizes study sessions, raises funds, displays artifacts, and holds movie nights.

Eligibility for departmental honors is by application; students must have a minimum 3.5 GPA. The program requires, in addition to the components mentioned above, a 400-level reading course, an honors thesis, and a minimum 3.5 GPA in departmental courses.

The department has a strong record in promoting and obtaining Undergraduate Research Awards; in 2015, two of the three awards in Humanities went to students in Ancient Studies.

G. Faculty Development; Teaching Quality

The teaching load for tenure-track and tenured faculty is 3/2; 3/3 for visiting Assistant Professors, and 4/4 for permanent and visiting Lecturers. The department's lecturers, in particular, carry a heavy load; some teach 150 or more students per semester with little grading support.

The chair meets individually with each faculty member twice a year to discuss matters of research and teaching. Currently, the department's sole assistant professor has been given a lighter administrative load in order to focus on research and publication.

The department places special emphasis on effective teaching; the results are reflected in student SCEQs, which for most courses are at or above the university mean.

The resources of the Kuhn Library have been found to be adequate for scholarly research in the fields of current faculty members; in addition, the Archaeology Lab serves as an important resource for the department.

H. Additional Comments; Summary Evaluation

A number of activities beyond the classroom serve to enrich the academic experience of Ancient

Studies majors: each Spring, members of the faculty design and lead a tour to places of interest for the study of the ancient world. The department encourages and subsidizes student travel to archaeological sites, and holds a yearly Ancient Studies Week, with scholarly lectures and student presentations, as well as the “Homerathon,” a public reading of an ancient play.

In summary, the department starts from a solid and impressive program, enriched by a number of extracurricular activities, and a dedicated and innovative teaching staff; these points are emphasized by the external reviewers. The department is currently in a state of transition, occasioned by the retirement of all of its tenured faculty in the period under review. Its main challenge is in building and stabilizing its permanent faculty; as the external reviewers note, this is critical for the productivity of the department, including attracting and retaining majors. Three faculty hires are envisioned to replace vacant lines: a historian of Rome and Greece with a specialization in ancient science and/or medicine; a Roman archaeologist with a specialization in cultural resource management and museum studies; and historian of the ancient Near East.