GREEK AND ROMAN STUDIES AT OTTAWA

The degree formerly known as ‘Classics’
Exploring Greek & Roman Civilizations
WHAT ARE GREEK & ROMAN STUDIES?
Or, ‘What is Classics’?
One definition

- Classics is the study of the languages, culture, history and thought of the civilisations of ancient Greece and Rome. It is one of the most varied and interdisciplinary of all subjects.
- Featuring a wide range of options, Classics offers the opportunity to study literature (epic, drama, historical writing, and much else), the history and archaeology of the Greek and Roman Mediterranean, philosophy (both ancient and modern), and linguistics.

Definition from: http://www.classics.ox.ac.uk/aboutclassics.html
WHY STUDY CLASSICS?
Oxford’s reasons. Below left: Homer

- Whether you want to learn languages, read literature, explore the effect of the past on the present, or learn to apply science to arts, Classics has something for everyone.

- The study of Classics requires students to develop the analytical skills needed to understand ancient languages and engage in disciplines such as linguistics and textual criticism.

- The subject’s involvement with a range of disciplines such as history, philosophy and art criticism, makes it constantly fresh and challenging and encourages mental versatility.
Further considerations

- It lies at the foundation of many aspects of today’s society, such as notions of democracy, freedom and equality.
- It is of itself inter-disciplinary, involving languages (Latin & Greek), history, archaeology and art history. There are also courses in ancient philosophy in the Philosophy department.
- A training in Classics can lead to any sort of career: the skills required to get a Classics degree set you up to be able to cope with all that the world of work may throw at you.
- Right: aqueduct of Valens, Istanbul.
The liberal arts are evolving and vital to Canada’s future. They fuel the imagination that drives innovation and prosperity. They provide a well-rounded workforce with the skills needed to navigate a rapidly changing labour market.

The competitive advantages the marketplace demands is someone more human, connected, and mature. Someone with passion and energy, capable of seeing things as they are and negotiating multiple priorities as she makes useful decisions without angst. Flexible in the face of change, resilient in the face of confusion. All of these attributes are choices, not talents, and all of them are available to you.

• — Seth Godin, *Linchpin: Are You Indispensable?*, January 2010
Selling the (underappreciated) value of a liberal arts education

With the help of University of Ottawa researcher Ross Finnie, Canadian universities hope to convince potential students that the much-maligned liberal arts educations they offer will pay off handsomely in jobs and income.

“You can see precisely what the outcomes have been,” Paul Davidson (President of Universities Canada) says, “and the outcomes (for liberal arts graduates) are very, very strong.”

Finnie’s first-of-its-kind research, first published in 2014, found those with engineering, business and computer science degrees did, in fact, earn the most. But graduates with liberal arts degrees didn’t fare badly at all.

Though their average starting salaries were lower — between $35,000 and $40,000 — they rose steadily over the years. By 2011, those who graduated with social sciences degrees in 1998 were earning nearly $80,000 on average. Even humanities grads were making not far off $70,000 a year.
The value of the humanities / arts

• The argument that STEM graduates have the jump on good jobs is also floundering. Surveys conducted by online job search websites like Workopolis consistently reveal that employers rate technical skills behind the “softer” ones like the ability to communicate well, show leadership, think analytically and provide insightful customer service.

• This fact is driving some employers to suggest that there is a need to focus on “STEAM” education (STEAM adds “Arts”), and one of them, Canadian high-tech CEO Michael Litt, has taken his argument to the top.

• Co-founder and chief executive of the video marketing platform Vidyard, Litt has blogged openly about his industry’s need for non-STEM staff.

• “At my company, as at many tech companies, developers only make up 15 to 25 per cent of our workforce. While tech businesses are booming, many of the jobs waiting to be filled require broader skill sets than just great engineering chops. And in my experience anyway, the truly irreplaceable jobs — not just of the future but of the present — are the roles that intermingle arts and science. My employees with humanities backgrounds regularly show they’re willing to learn new skills and try new things,” he states.
Problems with specialised degrees

- Career Change Statistics:
  - You Will Change Careers 7 Times in Your Life?

- The average person will change careers 5-7 times during their working life according to career change statistics.

- With an ever increasing number of different career choices on offer, approximately 30% of the total workforce will now change jobs every 12 months.

- By the age of 42 you will probably already have had about ten jobs.

- I have taken the details on the left hand side from:

- Even if they overestimate the number of changes, it remains the case that with a degree (say) in journalism, there are a limit to the potential avenues for a career; similarly for law, for instance, or for communication.

- A degree in Classics (or History or Philosophy), on the other hand, is open-ended: it can take you in any number of directions.

- Thus the conclusions just discussed are not surprising.
Further information on this issue

• The last two slides come from:
  • https://www.univcan.ca/universities/facts-and-stats/value-liberal-arts-quick-facts/
  • https://www.caut.ca/bulletin/2017/09/value-liberal-arts

• See also (in more detail):
  • http://udallasclassics.org/whyClassics.html
  • https://www.theguardian.com/education/2008/may/01/universityguide.classicseducation
  • https://arts.uottawa.ca/cla-srs/en/why-classics
WHY STUDY IT HERE?
The range of courses offered

• The department covers the full range of courses in Greek and Roman Studies.
• We offer the chance to study both Latin and Greek *ab initio*, i.e. (= id est) from scratch.
• We offer classes in classical literature both in these languages and in translation.
• We offer courses in ancient history, covering (e.g.) the fall of the Roman Republic, the rise of the Athenian democracy, as well as more specialised courses, e.g. on Roman women or Pompeii or Sparta.
• We also offer courses in classical mythology and on archaeology (leading to the possibility of taking part in fieldwork abroad).
• We have also set up a new course that allows students to take part (for credit) in a study trip to Italy or Greece. In May-June 2019 they went to Sicily.
Segesta, Sicily

A group picture from the trip to Segesta in Sicily, May 2019
The theatre at Taormina

Mount Etna in the background.
Greek and Latin literature

• To be sure, the languages are not easy – and yet they have exercised great influence over our modern languages.

• A good grasp of either ancient language helps you write better English (and can help you to learn other languages later).

• Right: Aeneas flees from Troy (from the Vatican manuscript of Vergil’s Aeneid).
Greek and Roman history

- As mentioned, we cover all fields of Greek and Roman history.
- We have a particular interest in the period known as Late Antiquity, i.e. the later Roman empire.
- Left: head of Constantine from the Capitoline museum, Rome.
The engagement of our professors

- We are fortunate to have faculty who are renowned scholars and recognised teachers: the Roman Civilization class of Richard Burgess (right) was mentioned in Maclean’s magazine for its outstanding quality.
- We also have an active student association that organises social events.
- Our museum gives students an opportunity to get involved in conservation and volunteer work.
Archaeological fieldwork

- Students who take the courses offered in archaeology have the chance to go abroad and take part in archaeological fieldwork.
- This is co-ordinated by Professor Jitse Dijkstra, who has worked in Egypt.
- Our students have taken part in digs in Greece, Croatia, Romania, Spain, Britain and elsewhere. They receive credit for this work and deliver a report in the autumn term about their experiences.
Video competition

Deadline for entries: 31 March 2020
Details: https://arts.uottawa.ca/cla-srs/en/video-contest
(These can easily be found on our website)
Medieval and Renaissance studies

• We also offer a Major and a Minor in this field.
• The major and minor in medieval and Renaissance studies are interdisciplinary programs whose multi-faceted approach helps students better understand the complexity and richness of medieval civilization. In addition to courses that provide an introduction to medieval civilization, the programs include a number of courses in history, classical studies, music, English, linguistics, English and French literatures and other disciplines.
Don’t forget to visit our museum, third floor of Desmarais building!

Guided tours are available by appointment only. Please call ahead to confirm: 613-562-5800 ext. 1163. Please visit the museum website for more information.