

Review Committee Report  
Department of Classics, Fall 2003  
St. Olaf

We would like to begin our report by thanking the Classics Department and St. Olaf College for its hospitality during our on-campus visit. Everyone we spoke to was courteous and helpful. We particularly appreciated that Myron Solid, Director of Licensure, made time for an unscheduled visit to discuss with us the licensure of Latin teachers in the state of Minnesota.

During our campus visit we met with students majoring in Classics, senior and junior faculty in the department, faculty from other departments, Lloyd Gunderson, professor emeritus, members of the Dean's Council, the Dean of Humanities, and the Dean and Provost. During our discussions with the various groups we focused on the following issues: strengths and weaknesses of the department, opportunities and possible threats, the need for another FTE in Classics, Medieval Studies concentration, status of the teacher preparation program, consequences of faculty overload, department philosophy, and structure of the major.

St. Olaf College should take pride in the fact that it has one of the most highly respected small Classics Departments in the country. It has a national reputation for excellence in pedagogy, for outstanding preparation of its graduates, and for distinction of its faculty in scholarship, service to the profession, and commitment to teaching. The graciousness and collegiality of the faculty is a key factor in the success and reputation of the department. As a result, the department has always been able to recruit junior and temporary faculty from the cream of the profession. The senior faculty are to be commended for their reputations in the field and for their individual achievements and honors. They have held high offices in local, regional, and national Classics organizations. They are widely published, and their views are well respected by their peers in their areas of specialization. We commend them for having developed and adhered to their principles and philosophy for the teaching of the Classical Languages. It is this clear and consistent approach that is responsible for the success of the program and its graduates. The faculty outside the department and the Classics majors with whom we met concurred with our high opinion of the faculty and the program. One of them even described the department "as the jewel of the college."

We found the Self-Study Report to be complete and accurate, and we recommend that the department use this as a document for strategic planning. We urge the department to continue to emphasize philological training of its students and to maintain its high standards. We see, however, two areas in which the program can be improved. The department should raise the profile of the Latin licensure program, and the College should increase staffing in the department. We will elaborate on these two issues below, since both are addressed as numbers 4 and 6 in the Department Self-Study.

## 1. Curricular Emphasis.

The great strength of the program is the emphasis on student acquisition of linguistic skills. The department should adhere to this sound philosophy as long as the program is limited to three FTEs. The department could ensure that its students acquire a broader perspective of the ancient world by adding ancient history as a requirement. At the minimum, Latin majors should take Roman history; Greek majors should take Greek history; and Ancient Studies and Classics majors should take both. If an additional faculty member were hired, as we recommend under 'Number Six,' the department should consider developing a senior capstone experience. This course paired with careful development of articulated strands within existing courses could easily address the department's concerns about coverage of the other topics enumerated.

## 2. Curricular Shape.

From our discussion with faculty and students, it became apparent that double majoring is deeply ingrained in the campus culture at St. Olaf. Since the faculty appears to be opposed to academic minors, this is not likely to change. Regrettably any increase of requirements will result in fewer Classics majors.

## 3. Persistence.

The persistence rate from language acquisition to literature courses appears to be within normal parameters for a small liberal arts college. While it is commendable that the department wishes to improve on its better than average persistence rate, we do not view this as a cause for alarm or a mandate for any systemic change. The best way to improve retention is to limit class sizes at the first- and second-year level. We were concerned to see 30 students or more enrolled in an introductory language course. Between twenty and twenty-four students is an ideal size for the active learning teaching styles of the department. If additional FTEs are not available, the courses should be capped.

## 4. K-12 Latin Licensure.

We commend the department for its concern about the small number of students who have pursued K-12 Latin teaching licensure at St. Olaf. The lack of credentialed Latin teachers, especially in the public schools, has reached the crisis stage across the United States. M.A.T. programs and employment at private schools are excellent options for St. Olaf students who pursue double majors, but they carry both financial consequences and extended time commitments. Since St. Olaf College is graced with an excellent Education department, which is more than eager to accommodate future Latin teachers, the department should strive to raise the profile of its participation in this program with current and prospective students.

## 5. Study Abroad.

We think the interim program offered by the department is excellent and provides an exposure which is sufficient for most majors. The department should make all of its students aware of summer opportunities for both study and active excavation through other institutions. Finally, the department could encourage students who have ambitions to do advanced study in the Classics to pursue semester-long opportunities for study abroad. There are two highly regarded cooperative semester-long study abroad programs, College Year in Athens and Intercollegiate Center for Classical Studies in Rome. It is our experience that students need their home financial support to pursue these programs. Therefore, making them both St. Olaf approved programs would be a commendable, though time-consuming, goal. A possible solution to the high-cost of an ICCSR membership would be to form a consortium of Minnesota Classics programs to share the expense.

## 6. FTE Pressure.

All of the members of the Department of Classics are seriously overextended. While their willingness to teach uncompensated teaching overloads reflects a lofty nobility of spirit, such self-sacrifice is destructive in the long run. This was a particular concern and a potential source of friction to the faculty outside of the department, who worry about faculty "burn-out" and a precedent for college-wide policy. While occasional overloads are unavoidable in any small Liberal Arts program, they have become standard operating procedures here. Since Classics faculty value their participation in college-wide and general education programs, reducing their time in those areas does not appear to be a viable option. In addition, with senior faculty doing administration and participating in other programs, non-tenure track faculty are teaching the majority of courses in the major. This is not a healthy situation. Three FTEs are simply not enough to accomplish the mission of the department given the numbers of outstanding students which it attracts. In order to offer the needed comprehensive and/or capstone courses, it will be necessary to increase the FTEs allotted to the department. Four full FTEs would be ideal and sufficient for the foreseeable future. Under no circumstance can the department function with fewer than three full FTEs, supplemented by the occasional support of administrators and other members of the faculty. One should not structure a program that depends on the kindness of others. An intermediate compromise could be the creation of a position new to the college, which is shared by Classics and another department. Possible combinations could be Religion, Philosophy, or Art History. An Art Historian with training in the languages and a specialization in any area of Antiquity would seem to be an excellent fit. The field has many candidates who could fill this position and who could address curricular concerns raised in issue number one.

## 7. Medieval Studies.

The Medieval Studies Program is an excellent example of an interdisciplinary opportunity for committed students and creative faculty. From our meeting with the faculty outside the department, it appears that changes in personnel, internal alterations in constituent courses, and departmental commitments threaten the viability of the program. The program, situated in the Classics Department, taxes both the personnel and the program of the department and is an additional burden for the chair. What is more, because the course in Medieval Latin must alternate with the only course in Virgil, some students complete their major without exposure to an author who is considered Rome's greatest poet. This is unconscionable. We urge the Dean of Humanities to conduct an internal review of the Medieval Studies program in order to make an informed decision as to whether it should be retained.

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