About

Department of Classics Mission Statement

The discipline known as "classics" is concerned with the world of the ancient Greeks and Romans. That world surrounds us at every turn, from local architecture to a pervasive presence in popular culture. The mission of the department of Classics at the University of Washington is to make sense of and engage with this heritage, in ways that help students develop into critical, productive, and fulfilled members of twenty-first century society.

After decades of focusing on the STEM fields, educational and professional leaders are relearning the importance of the liberal arts to higher education (see, for instance, Google's Project Oxygen). Classics is among the most rigorous of these disciplines, with a proven track record of preparing students for a variety of satisfying careers. Our department strives to play this role in innovative and useful ways, often in collaboration with other departments and programs (History, Art History, Hellenic Studies, GWSS, Philosophy, and Near Eastern Languages & Civilization). We aim to produce thoughtful, versatile adults who are well prepared for active civic participation and professional growth, ready to enrich the lives of others as well as themselves with lifelong intellectual vitality, analytical acumen, and the ability to communicate effectively in speech and writing.

Our department offers multiple points of access to the cultures of the ancient Mediterranean. To study Classics is to take an active part in the humanistic enterprise, as expressed through diverse historical manifestations in theater, fiction, poetry, philosophy, art, architecture, and screen media. In addition, the complex relationships between ancient Greeks, the Romans, and other neighboring cultures offer models of cultural interaction that are very much relevant to contemporary life. Greek and Roman writers, thinkers, and artists show us a world vibrant with cultural interaction and exchange, suggesting valuable conceptual tools for a better understanding of our own multicultural era.

While acknowledging the importance of antiquity in many areas of cultural history, research in Classics also brings students and scholars face to face with the Otherness of the past and forces a critical examination of its influence on our history. Like a fun-house mirror in which we can observe ourselves in a state of distortion, simultaneously familiar and other, Greek and Roman antiquity furnishes us with a special vantage point from which to critique what is taken for granted in our own time and place. Even its most negative aspects (such as slavery and patriarchy, to mention the most obvious) offer useful points of departure for negotiating some persistent problems of our time.

The success of the Classics Department at the University of Washington in this marriage of past and present is manifest in our flourishing language programs. Our graduate students continue to succeed in an extremely competitive job market, and our undergraduate majors are in high demand at the foremost graduate and professional schools. But we are also committed to reaching anyone with a more general interest in the ancient world and its continuing significance. We therefore offer a broad range of courses in English designed to enrich the intellectual and cultural life of students in all fields of study. Our curricular diversity has enabled many UW students to combine a major or minor in Classics with majors in (for example) Mathematics, English, Biology, Drama, History, Political Science, and Art History, to name just a few.
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