Assessment of Learning Goals for the Department of Classical Studies

Overall statement about what the discipline of Classical Studies is and what our general learning goals in the discipline are:

The Department of Classical Studies is fundamentally interdisciplinary offering courses in the languages, literatures, history, art, archaeology, mythology, and religions of ancient Greece and Rome. These two classical cultures provide intellectual, social, political, legal, medical, philosophical, scientific, and artistic origins of Western civilization. Undergraduate students are afforded a great variety of choice, since the field is wide and deep, thus fostering their intellect and creativity. Taken together and explored either through traditional or interdisciplinary approaches, the topics in Classical Studies offer undergraduate students a detailed knowledge of life in the ancient Mediterranean, Near East, northern Europe, and north Africa over a period of more than 4,000 years (3,000 B.C.E. to 1,000 C.E.).

Students are given the opportunity to learn both from the great literary works of each culture in the original languages, ancient Greek and Latin, or in translation, and from the historical and archaeological records of these cultures. The subjects of inquiry range from iconic art and architecture like the Parthenon frieze, the dome of the Pantheon, or the Colosseum, right down to the nitty-gritty concerns of everyday life, like gender and sexuality, slavery, prostitution, medical practices, and diseases.

As recently as about 100 years ago, the scholarly study of Classics or Classical Studies, along with the Hebrew Bible, were the original, stand-alone disciplines of all university study. Despite its pedigree, the field of Classical Studies is vibrant and constantly changing from new discoveries, methodologies, interpretations, and relationships with other disciplines (including Anthropology, Computer Science, Fine Arts, History, Linguistics, Physics, Religious Studies, and Women and Gender Studies in recent years, to name but a few). Students learn to clarify and assess meanings from time-honored texts and artifacts in order to understand them better in their own ancient context and to reveal their continuing impact on modern life (in our political systems, architecture, engineering practices, films, TV programs, and in every other discipline across the university curriculum). The brilliance, beauty, and ongoing inspiration of ancient Greece and Rome have not ceased to beguile, intrigue, shock, and inform students for more than 2,000 years.

1. **Core Skills expected to be attained—in communication, quantitative information, and strong critical thinking skills.**

   The Classical Studies major stresses core skills in language acquisition (ancient Greek and/or Latin), textual analysis (of classical texts and modern literature in translation), critical thinking (about complex ideas gleaned from these past civilizations concerning art and/or classical archaeology, history, law, literary genres, mythology, politics, and religion), and excellent
communication and writing skills. Students who major in Classical Studies:

*pursue and craft professional scholarly research using ancient sources, as well as modern publications from the field of Classical Studies and related interdisciplinary fields.

*analyze and evaluate information intensely and critically (both from ancient Greek and Roman texts and from the archaeological and historical record). This means that students learn to question everything in these ancient cultures and everything studied about them so far (motives of the ancient or modern author, assumptions, and conclusions) through the lens of cultural perspective.

*express and communicate with precision and clarity all facts, ideas, opinions, and beliefs, which can be a liberating and exhilarating experience when carried out on cultures of so long ago. This means that students learn to design research methodologies, structure careful arguments in their papers or theses, and make well-supported cases for their findings in all written or oral presentations.

2. Knowledge attained from the major (research and scholarship, flexibility, creativity)

Students majoring in Classical Studies have exposure to many of the major questions, concepts, theories, ethical issues, and current methodologies of this professional discipline. The requirements for concentration are designed to be flexible, so that individual students can focus their program around a particular interest like art and archaeology, history, literature, or mythology, and fully explore their intellectual creativity through their studies. Students may complete the major in any one of the three tracks:

1. Classics (Greek and Latin languages and literatures);
2. Greek or Latin languages and literatures; or
3. Classical Archaeology and Ancient History (less emphasis on language)

Students graduate with a significant knowledge of and competency in:

*What it means to be human through the lens of classical antiquity;
*The rich diversity of ancient Greece and Rome and how those cultures dealt with that diversity (which inevitably helps us understand our own global culture);
*How inequality (between the sexes, between classes, between and among peoples and nations) affected ancient cultures and helps us understand how it still affects modern societies;
*Language skills in either Greek and/or Latin (at least to the intermediate level in the Classical Archaeology and Ancient History track, and through advanced level in the other two tracks);
*The geography, mythologies, literatures, political thinking, philosophies, religions, daily life practices, material culture, architectural remains, and
art of the civilizations of ancient Greece and/or Rome and their impact on modern societies.

3. Social Justice (in relation to CLAS)—how CLAS majors can participate as informed citizens in a global society, understand diversity, and engage in service.

The ancient Greeks were the first people in the west to try to define justice and what it means in social, political, and philosophical terms. The Romans, on the other hand, were the people who invented the fundamental concepts that survive, for good or ill, in the British and American legal system, starting in the seventh century B.C.E. In addition, the major provides graduates with the knowledge, ethical thinking, and critical perspective necessary to function as informed citizens in our complex and global world society. The interdisciplinary approaches within the field of Classical Studies encourage acceptance of “otherness” and diversity that can be profoundly unsettling to our modern psyches, and this forces us to examine who we are now.

Students in Classical Studies learn research methods that are open and honest, and they come to appreciate excellent public dissemination of research results (through traditional and internet publication methods, conferences on and off campus, collaborations with local museums and nearby academic institutions). They learn how to engage scholars across time and geographical space in pursuit of a common scholarly goal. All of these strategies provide specific tools and opportunities to a wide range of Brandeis students who are committed to the concept of social justice or to learning for service.

Upon graduating:

Students who major in Classical Studies will have been exposed to the aesthetic, spiritual, moral, and intellectual values of the classical world along with their ongoing applications to today’s problems and challenges. Such study is invaluable in itself, but it can have many practical uses as well. For example, the study of Latin is a proven key to communication skills in English and in the Romance languages. Furthermore, both Latin and Greek have long been and continue to be sources of technical concepts and vocabulary in all fields of study, from cybernetics to political economy. A major in Classical Studies also enhances preparation for a wide number of professional fields, including business, education, government, law, library science, and medicine, as well as the graduate study of literature, history, fine arts, archaeology, anthropology, philosophy, religion, and classics itself. Everyone who samples the field comes away a better person for it.