

**DEPARTMENT OF CLASSICS  
ACADEMIC PROGRAMME REVIEW PANEL**

**REPORT**

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**REPORT OF THE PANEL**

**I. STRENGTHS OF THE DEPARTMENT**

1. There is clearly an extraordinary degree of excellence in scholarship, research, and publication within the Department of Classics at Memorial University. The academic records of the members of the Department speak for themselves, but it is not inappropriate to point out that some have been honoured with the President's Award for Outstanding Research, and more than half have won major grants from SSHRC. The Department also enjoys a high profile nationally and has made major contributions to classical studies in Canada. Witness *Mouseion*, formerly *Classical Views/Echos du monde classique*. This journal, published by the Classical Association of Canada and edited by some members of the Department, makes a significant contribution to classical studies in Canada and undoubtedly adds to the national and international reputation of the Department. Indeed, the decision to house the journal at Memorial University was made some years ago by the Classical Association of Canada in view of the Department's high scholarly reputation across the country. One might also add that the recently instituted arrangement whereby the journal and the Dean of Graduate Studies split the cost of funding a graduate assistantship benefits the Department's graduate programme no less than the journal.
2. The members of the Department show a true commitment to teaching and a real devotion to their students (something which the students themselves clearly appreciate). The consistent involvement of the Department in distance education is also to be commended, and the Department is to be recognized for its efforts in cooperating with other Departments teaching cross-listed courses and in seeking to increase the number of such courses.
3. The library resources are superb. The collections are more than adequate for any study or research at the BA or MA level, and provide a fine working library for all members of the Department.
4. At the decanal level, administrative support for the Department has been uniformly and consistently positive, and much credit is due to the Dean and Associate Dean of Arts and the Dean of Graduate Studies for their contributions in this area.
5. Secretarial support within the Department is irreproachable, and the present secretary, Mrs Cathy Kieley, is to be congratulated on her efficiency and helpfulness.
6. Technical support (hardware, software, advice, and trouble-shooting) provided by Memorial University for its Classics Department compares very favourably with that available to similar Departments at other Canadian universities. The computers and reference materials kept in the

Department's Faculty Resource Room and Departmental Library are of signal service to both faculty and students (graduate and undergraduate), though the computer in the Faculty Resources Room needs to be upgraded. It is no longer adequate for the most recent CD-ROM databases.

## II. PROBLEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is clearly a major problem relating to the number of faculty and the very broad range of programmes at present offered by the Department. On the good side, the Honours programmes are so rigorous that any student graduating from them will have a training at least equal, and perhaps superior, to that provided by any other Canadian university. On the bad side, the regulations and requirements of the programmes can be met by the present faculty only with difficulty, and if the only way in which these can be met is by extra teaching or by teaching courses *pro bono*, then it might be wiser to restructure the programmes. Students themselves have complained that the "wide variety of courses listed in the calendar are not taught often enough", and although these are common problems of smaller Departments, especially smaller Departments of Classics, they cannot be ignored.

### Recommendation

that the Department undertake an overall reconsideration of its undergraduate programmes, concentrating on (i) the possibility of pruning and/or consolidating courses; (ii) blending the programme requirements to economize on teaching resources; and (iii) continuing to explore the possibility of increasing the number of cross-listed courses so as to remove some of the burden at present placed on the members of the Department. The inclusion of more non-Classics courses for credit in Classics programmes would provide students with more options and thus remove some of the pressure from the Department's teaching resources. The reciprocal process--of increasing the number of courses presently offered by the Department that count for credit in non-Classics programmes--would also help the Department's enrolment figures. The Panel is well aware that such an overall reconsideration will be a major undertaking, but it would appear to be essential.

2. Equally clearly, there is also a major problem with the enrolment figures for basic language courses, especially in Latin. Part of the problem--perhaps a considerable part--may be associated with the lack of a satisfactory text-book, and concern in this matter was expressed by all members of the Department who teach the Latin courses. Other factors to be taken into account include (i) the nature and purpose of linked courses; and (ii) the question of four hours of instruction rather than three (a matter which requires careful consideration, primarily because of the problems it may impose upon students trying to arrange their timetables).

## **Recommendations**

a) that the Department examine the possibility of de-linking the basic language courses, and likewise examine the feasibility of offering two sections of the first half of at least the Latin course in the first semester and one section of the second half in the second semester.

b) that the Department investigate the use of StemNet (or some other similar cyber-system) for disseminating knowledge of the Department's offerings and interests throughout the school system. It is possible that the Department suffers from a lack of publicity.

c) that the Department maintain its present practice of offering the course in myth/mythology at the first-year level in every semester. With good teaching and appropriate academic rigour such a course may generate very large enrolments (witness Memorial's own experience this year), and some of the students may well go on to take other courses in Classics. One might even think of removing some specialized, low-enrolment courses from the Calendar in order to offer more sections of this course. This may appear pragmatical and barbaric, but when numbers are involved (and numbers are important), it has been shown in other universities to be effective.

d) that the Department vigorously address the question of a suitable textbook for Classics 120A/B, if necessary by collaborating to produce a manual that suits the goals of the programme.

3. There appear to be problems with the Research and Writing Courses, and some members of the faculty have expressed grave doubts as to their efficacy. Three problems appear to be of particular significance: (i) the lower enrolment caps of the Research and Writing courses conflict with the original purpose of Classics 1100 and 1200, viz., to introduce as many students as possible to the world of Ancient Greece and Rome; (ii) it seems likely that the new mythology course will generate an even higher demand for junior courses in Classics. As a consequence, the Department may have to turn away students wishing to use Classics courses to complete their Research and Writing requirements, and may thereby lose potential Majors or Minors in Greek and Roman Studies; and (iii) while instructors have found it impossible to do justice to the traditional content of the courses in the Research and Writing format, students also have difficulty in learning to write research papers, a genre with which they are not generally familiar when they arrive at the University (despite a second-level course on the subject at high school). Those Departments that teach the research paper at the first-year level (without agony or suicide on the part of faculty or students) generally have a policy of flexibility with regard to course content that allows students time to practise the stages of writing, with some opportunity at each stage for discussion and re-thinking. Where course content is a central concern it is difficult to give students such opportunities, and the result is either frustration or disillusionment on both sides.

### **Recommendation**

that the Department consider restructuring this aspect of its programme, perhaps by revising or even reducing content so as to serve the Research and Writing function better at the first-year level; perhaps by offering the Research and Writing courses at the second-year level. It seems pointless to suggest increasing the number of Research and Writing sections when the Department is already so stretched.

4. There was considerable concern on the part of the Panel with regard to the stringent admission requirements of the MA programme, and also--and more importantly--with what might be termed its "exit requirements". High standards are, of course, eminently laudable, but the Panel felt that more was expected of students in this programme than in any other MA programme in the Faculty of Arts at Memorial University, and probably in any other MA programme in Classics in the country. More specifically, the Panel was deeply concerned about the combination of course work, reading list/comprehensive examination, and thesis, a combination required by no other Department at Memorial University. It is true that any student graduating from the programme will be well prepared for doctoral work, but one should perhaps balance this advantage against the more realistic demands of other MA programmes both in this university and across the country. Furthermore, if the requirements of the programme are such that an average, intelligent, hard-working graduate student cannot reasonably expect to complete the programme within two years, then the demands are fair neither to the programme nor to the student. With regard to these concerns, the Panel would draw the attention of the Department to two statements on page 3 of the *Report of the Panel to Review the Proposal to Offer the Degree of Master of Arts in Classics*:

The Review Committee lauds the Department of Classics for the rigour and effort expected of its future M.A. students, but would advise the Department to guard against requiring Ph.D. level work for an M.A.

and:

it should not be cause for surprise or concern if the Department were, some time in the future, to moderate [the language requirement and/or the reading list], in the light of experience of the needs and interests of the students.

### **Recommendation**

that the Department consider reconfiguring the programme to allow for two graduate streams: one based on course work and a dissertation/thesis, the other based on course work and a comprehensive examination. The precise number of courses to be completed in either case would naturally be the decision of the Department. Such reconfiguration might also go some way to alleviating, if not solving, the perceived problem of inadequate completion of the programme. The use of the term "perceived"

here reflects the fact that although the question was frequently raised in its deliberations, the Panel did take account of the recent implementation of the programme. This has perhaps not allowed sufficient time for the incidence of completion of the MA degree to be placed in proper perspective. The Panel is in no doubt that the graduate programme is extremely rigorous and aimed at wholly exceptional rather than very good students; it is equally in no doubt that this is not quite the aim of other MA programmes, either at Memorial or across Canada.

5. While the Panel heard from three students directly, all of whom were very positive about both the faculty and the programme, the Panel cannot but regret that there is no systematic gathering of information about the students' perspectives on their experiences in the Department. Some of the problems apparent to the Panel (and, indeed, to members of the Department) might be easier to define and address if a range of student views were on record. The Panel is aware that the question of mandatory course evaluation is at present under debate, and the consequences of that debate may make the following recommendation otiose.

#### **Recommendation**

that the Department consider drawing up a basic list of questions for students to answer each semester regarding the courses they take: scope, interest, level of difficulty, time per week spent on reading and writing, the student's reasons for taking the course, whether the student is a Major or a Minor, and so on. Obviously, no Department would ever plan its offerings exclusively on the basis of students' perceptions, but Departments do benefit from knowing what these perceptions are.

6. The Panel feels it must draw attention to the obvious fact that the present Head of the Department will soon be retiring. The related questions of the potential loss to the complement of departmental faculty and the need for a successor to the present Head are obviously of crucial importance and decisions on the matter cannot be delayed. The Panel is not speaking here of personalities--of who should succeed the present Head--but of whether the new Head should be an Ancient Historian, whether he or she should be a senior scholar who can immediately assume the headship of the Department, whether he or she should be appointed from within or without the present faculty, and so on.

#### **Recommendations**

a) that under no circumstances should the faculty complement of the Department of Classics be allowed to fall.

b) that the Department discuss in the appropriate manner the academic profile of its next Head as soon as possible.

7. While the Panel heard nothing but praise for the quality of mentoring which students

receive, it was also brought to the Panel's attention that in a Department with so many female students, the presence of female scholars/teachers would be an inspiration and a model.

### **Recommendation**

that where qualifications and experience are equal, the appointment of female faculty should be a priority.

8. Finally, the Panel could hardly fail to observe that there are, at present, grave problems in inter-personal relationships within the Department. Such problems would be of concern to the Panel only if they appeared to impinge on the effectiveness of departmental teaching and research, or appeared to have an adverse effect on students. There is, however, no clear evidence of this. It is, of course, the hope of the Panel that these difficulties may be resolved, but the members of the Panel were unanimous in expressing their astonishment that Appendix A, and then the subsequent submissions, should have been included with the Self-Study Document and circulated to the members of the Panel. It would be wholly inappropriate for the Panel to enter into the matter of individual grievances, and the members of the Panel laid aside these documents as being irrelevant to their deliberations.