



FROM	Sonya Clark (Vice President Academic) and Jayendra Chhana (Education Organiser)
TO	Review Committee: Classics Programme Review.
DATE	4 April 2013
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SUBJECT	Student Submission

Kia ora Members of the Academic Programme Review Panel,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Classics Programme, offered within the School of Art History, Classics, and Religious Studies. Over the past two weeks, VUWSA has been surveying Trimester One Class Representatives from the Classics Programme, as well as the general student population to gauge feedback on the Programme. The Class Representative Submission has specifically looked at items on the Review's Terms of Reference.

We have prepared the following submission from the survey results and subsequent feedback given by 16 respondents (six Class Representatives and 10 students in Classics, Greek, and Latin Courses).

It is important to keep in mind that the class representatives who have responded to this survey have been specifically trained to gather informal feedback from class members throughout the trimester. They are tasked with obtaining a general perspective of student opinion and feeding this back to their co-ordinators, school and the university as a whole. However, given the obvious low response rate, we would ask that the Panel use comments in this submission as a measure of triangulation with the other sources of data gathered.

Quantitatively, representation in the Classics Programme is progressing well. In Trimester One of 2013, five out of seven undergraduate courses in Classics, Greek, and Latin have a representative with two further representatives from within the honours Programme. Consequently, our feedback should be considered to cover the range and depth of undergraduate and honours courses offered within the Programme.

From the feedback received by VUWSA, the School of Art History, Classics, and Religious Studies should be commended on the delivery of its courses in the Classics Programme. In general, students feel that there is a strong and accessible focus on research, such that assessment activities provide real aids to the learning experience, and that students, as a whole, are made to feel involved as part of a learning community.

Nevertheless, there are a few areas that may need addressing and improving. These areas, as identified by responding students, concern the communication of objectives and opportunities for courses within the Classics Programme, and support for both struggling students and cultural diversity.

**We would suggest the following recommendations to be considered once a triangulation of data has occurred:**

- **That VicCareers works with the School of Art History, Classics and Religious Studies to update the Career View pamphlet on Classics which might provide an understanding of the discipline in both academic and non-academic settings. Ideally it should provide information on careers both inside and outside academia with specifics on both knowledge bases and transferable skills.**
- **Look at how transparent and accessible the support for struggling students is within the Programme.**
- **Further investigate the issue of cultural diversity within the Programme. This could be done either in the make-up of course or even in their operation and promotion.**

The following submission looks specifically at each of the items in the Terms of Reference.

**1. To what extent is the design of the overall Programme and its courses comprehensive, current, coherent and clearly communicated to all teaching staff and students?**

*Actually I think from what I can tell, VUW is the BEST place to study Classics – not just comparable.*

A majority of respondents felt that there was both clear progression of skills and knowledge in the various courses offered by the Programme, and that Victoria's Classics Programme was comparable to programmes elsewhere. It was also agreed, for the most part, that expected skills to be developed by graduates of the Programme were clearly communicated to students.

*I feel as though my Classics degree will not get me anywhere in life. It has always been an interest degree to me, not one with much potential. I think the career options following graduation need to be discussed as it puts many students off studying the Arts. The Arts have a reputation for being useless.*

On the other hand, there was a more divided response as to whether learning objectives and opportunities for courses within the Programme had been clearly communicated to students. As such, the comment above gives one possible indication of concerns in this area, namely that students within the Programme have difficulty conceptualising specific career paths after they graduate. This has been the case also with other similar disciplines.

We would suggest that it might be useful to work with VicCareers to update its current Career View publication. While the current version contains much good information, including information on both academic and non-academic career paths, the case studies and personal profiles are somewhat out of date such that current students would be unable to relate to them.

**2. To what extent does the Programme integrate research into teaching and learning activities?**

The overwhelming majority of students agreed that courses in the Classics Programme both allowed for the development of basic research skills, and displayed how research in the discipline contributes to the wider development of knowledge. Nearly half of respondents, though, were either unaware or unsure of the research interests of staff teaching in Classics.

### **3. What is the quality of the learning opportunities provided by the Programme?**

An overwhelming majority of respondents felt both that the learning activities practised in the Programme actively assisted them in meeting the course objectives, and that the facilities made available in the department were, likewise, helpful.

### **4. How well does assessment align with Programme learning goals and foster learning?**

*Sometimes things are too heavily weighted towards exams. In a Classics paper a lot of research is often involved. A 2/3 hour exam puts a lot of pressure on remembering tiny and obscure details from small snippets in course readers, as well as expecting you to make a concise comment on a very specific topic when you've already completed a research essay. I think things like research essays which really reflect the type of skills we should be learning should be worth more assessment wise, than putting 50% of the grade on your exam.*

Respondents generally agreed that assessment in the Programme met the learning objectives, that they were satisfied with the current moderation of assessments, and that, on the whole, they had received timely, consistent, and effective feedback in courses offered by the Programme. It should be noted here, though, that over a quarter of respondents expressed reservations in each area. To this effect, the comment above provides some insight, namely that there is an inadequate balance between examination of ideas and concepts on the one hand, and specific details on the other. However, given the number favourable responses in this area, this does not necessarily suggest the need for any major examination of assessment procedure.

### **5. To what extent has the Programme developed a learning and teaching environment that effectively promotes engagement in learning and a sense of academic community?**

An overwhelming majority of respondents both believed they belonged to a diverse academic community within the Classics Programme and that they had been encouraged to participate in learning activities. Likewise most respondents agreed that students are encouraged to continue through to higher levels of study. On the other hand, however, when asked if they felt that struggling students were monitored by staff, nearly a half of respondents answered in the negative. This would seem to suggest a need for wider promotion of support networks.

### **6. How effectively and efficiently does the Programme manage, explore and reflect on learning and teaching in relation to its learning and teaching goals?**

When asked as to whether courses in the Classics Programme reflected an active engagement with evaluation processes, nearly one half of respondents were either unsure or answered in the negative. In the absence of specific comments, it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions here: do students see courses as "stagnant" or do they feel that they have little input in this respect? For that matter, would either situation be a cause for concern? It should be noted though of the considerable number of responses in the negative.

### **7. How clearly and effectively is the Programme linked to and responsive to its relevant academic, social and professional communities?**

*I do not think Classics, Greek and Latin are relative to the Maori disciplines. I am yet to see a Maori or Pacific in a paper for these degrees and I have been studying them for 5 years. It is also a very complex subject, many international students would struggle with the pace and language, whereas in commerce they strive.*

An overwhelming majority of respondents were either unsure or answered in the negative when asked if courses in the Classics Programme supported the development of Maori Scholarship within the university. A similar response was received on the question of the inclusion of Maori and Pacific perspectives. Just over half of respondents were either unsure or disagreed that the academic and social needs of international students had been accommodated within the Programme. Whether any of these situations present causes for concern, it is difficult to say. The above comment would seem to both acknowledge the vast distance between Maori and Pacific, and Greco-Roman Worlds, yet also demonstrates some discomfort at the lack of cultural diversity within the Classics Programme as a whole.

We suggest that some further investigation be done on the issue of cultural diversity within the Programme. This could be either in the make-up of course or even in their operation and promotion.

Otherwise, an overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that the Programme fostered interdisciplinary links.

#### **8. Has the panel identified any examples of good practice in learning and teaching that it feels should be shared more widely?**

The teaching performance of Prof. Jeff Tatum received strong comment:

*Jeff Tatum is an amazing lecturer, who is very passionate about the Roman History course. He knows how to make the information relatable to our age and time, and is able to bring humour into the lectures which keeps us fully engaged!*

It is perhaps significant that a key strength here is Prof. Tatum's ability to bridge ancient and contemporary worlds.

There also appears an interesting comment on language instruction:

*Smaller group tutorials for learning the languages would be really helpful. Also a site with model answers, or a way of knowing whether the translations from the text book are correct.*

The reference here is most likely to the larger first year classes and suggests some thought is required in this area.

#### **Closing Remarks**

It is clear from our survey that the Classics Programme at Victoria is one for which the School of Art History, Classics, and Religious Studies merits considerable commendation. For VUWSA, it is a pleasure to be able to pass on such praiseworthy student feedback.

This is not, however, to diminish the validity of the small number of issues raised within certain areas of the Programme. We hope that the information and analysis we have provided can be of use for the Committee in determining how to make the Classics Programme an even better one.

Prepared by Jayendra Chhana (Education Organiser, VUWSA) in consultation with Sonya Clark (Academic Vice President VUWSA).