Plan for Classical Studies Major

In the current budget climate it is imperative that all faculty in Arts and Letters, including those in Classical Studies, reevaluate their mission and plan how best to fulfill their educational goals now and in the future. We believe it is essential to preserve the core values of the University and to recognize the importance of the humanities in our curriculum. This has been made clear by President Lou Anna Simon in her description of Michigan State as a World Grant University. President Simon stresses the durability and continued relevance of the University’s original mission and shows how the Morrill Act remains fundamental to this mission. A World Grant University, as President Simon observes, is one that affirms the ideals of the Morrill Act and recognizes the importance of melding the liberal arts with the practical and applied sciences.

The document, Shaping the Future, also emphasizes the need for MSU to retain its core values and identity. It calls attention to the priority of the University’s academic mission and underscores the importance of remaining competitive with our peers on key reputational measures.

These guiding principles are especially relevant to Classical Studies, for Classical Studies is the only humanities discipline that is mandated by Section 4 of the Morrill Act to be included as part of the curriculum, and hence it is essential to the mission of the University. We believe that Classical Studies will play an essential role as the University meets and emerges from its present budgetary difficulties, for not only are we a cornerstone of the University’s mission, we are also uniquely positioned to contribute to the University’s goal of retaining value and providing an outstanding undergraduate education to our students.

Classical Studies also has compelling relevance to the modern world and contributes to President’s Simon’s vision of a World Grant University. Classical Studies is by its nature interdisciplinary, linking multiple fields of knowledge: literature, philology, art, archaeology, religion, cultural studies, anthropology, gender studies, philosophy, theater, ethnicity, history, law—these have all been incorporated in the study of ancient Greece and Rome from its beginnings as a discipline up to the present day. The ancient world is not only our inheritance, it is also a challenge to our ways of thinking. Greece and Rome are foreign cultures and they offer a model for how we can come to understand and celebrate the nature of difference. As we reach out in an increasingly global world, it is also vitally important to understand the fundamentals of other conceptions of global worlds that we find in the expansion of Hellenism under Alexander the Great and the spread of Roman culture under the empire. Inclusiveness, the mingling of cultures, competition among religions, issues of identity, war, colonialism and post-colonialism, are all issues that we face today, and they are all present when we turn our attention to the ancient world. They are part of the lasting relevance of Greece and Rome.

Courses in the Classical Studies major reach a broad student audience. This semester alone there are approximately 60 different majors represented in our courses. We sincerely believe that we provide an important value to the College and to the University; but we recognize that in the present budget climate we need to call upon the kind of innovative thinking that has always characterized our program. We propose to expand our offerings in IAH by including new courses in Literature, Cultures, and Identities and in Great Ages, the Ancient World, along with the regular rotation of courses in our major.
We will also create new on-line courses on Medical Terminology and the Greek and Latin Roots of English, based on previous offerings, which will also be part of the rotation. These on-line courses will be of practical value to students in the fields of nursing, medicine, and pre-law. The IAH courses will augment our already broad audience and enrich our students’ experience in general education. We also affirm our commitment to other innovations in our curriculum through regular offerings of civilization courses that feature Reacting to the Past content and methodology and by the regular offering of our cross-listed course on Myth, Legend, and the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. A summary of our plan, along with estimated enrollments and the cost of instruction, appears below.

Teaching, of course, extends beyond the classroom. We will continue to enhance student experience through our student organization, which is open to non-majors; by continuing the Joe Bennett Memorial Lecture series; by featuring our own faculty in student oriented lectures open to the general public, and by maintaining and developing our study abroad offerings.

We firmly believe that the presence of the Classical Studies major shows Michigan State University’s affirmation of the Morrill Act, and that our peer institutions will recognize MSU’s commitment both to its heritage as The Pioneer Land Grant University and to the responsibilities of leadership that come with its new role as a World Grant University.