

28 March 2023

To the Society of Classical Studies and the SCS Joint Committee on Classics in American Education,

This past April, I received a Pedagogy Award of \$2,500 to fund several projects: purchasing materials to produce *ostraka*, epigraphic squeezes, laser-cut facsimiles of ancient documents, and Greek political documents on marble slabs. All these activities were graded assessments which, upon completion, also required students to turn in reflection essays that discussed how their understanding of literacy and writing in the ancient world transformed during each project. These projects have all been documented and posted onto the Temple University Classics Department's social media [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) account pages.

The first assignment the Pedagogy Award funded was one where students in my *Ancient City: Athens* course voted to ostracize Greek politicians by recording their names on *ostraka*. The materials for this assignment were easy to acquire. I purchased a set of five flower vases and bases from Home Depot, broke them all (with some gleeful student participation) and distributed the *ostraka* to my class along with a list of Greek politicians and a hand-out of the Greek alphabet. Students had to source whatever tools were available to them to carve onto the pottery, apply their knowledge of Athenian history to select an appropriate politician, and document their work by video or photography. Students reported that they very much enjoyed this assignment and that, contrary to opinion about equating one's level of literacy through an analysis of the lettering on an *ostrakon*, the shape and style of the lettering are a product of working on a curved material and a hard surface.

The second assignment the Pedagogy Award funded was creating epigraphic squeezes of inscriptions on Temple's Main campus. This assignment was also for my *Ancient City: Athens* course and it introduced students to the methods that historians use to gather inscribed historical information. Funds allowed for the purchase of squeeze paper, a variety of brushes, sponges to clean the stones, and water buckets. The most difficult part of this assignment was purchasing chemical paper from a chemical company and arranging delivery to my address. This required several follow-up calls to arrange as the company was neither used to nor comfortable delivering to an address that was not a laboratory. This whole process took over two months which forced me to rearrange my syllabus, but also allowed the class to take advantage of crisp fall weather when completing the activity. The second difficulty in executing this assignment was purchasing squeeze brushes whose bristles had the appropriate stiffness. As a Regular Member of the American School, it was a point of pride among epigraphers and epigraphy students alike to purchase a custom-made brush which had stiff horse-hair bristles for making squeezes. To complete this assignment with twenty-five students, however, I had to buy materials in bulk and could not rely on custom-made, expensive tools. I purchased a variety of horsehair brushes and other types of brushes at both Lowe's and Home Depot and tested them by creating squeezes on inscribed granite slabs at Temple. Many brushes had bristles that were too stiff and destroyed the squeeze paper; others were too soft and did not make a satisfactory impression on the paper. When I discovered the brushes that worked best, I purchased more than enough for the students to use. I divided my class of 25 into groups of five; each of these groups received a single horsehair brush, a bucket of water, a sponge, and five pieces of squeeze paper. I performed a short demonstration by creating a squeeze and then had my students work with their groups to each create a squeeze. Students then labeled their squeezes with tape and documented their work through video or photography. This exercise was a great success and many students requested that it be done in future classes.

The third assignment the Pedagogy Award funded was a project of reproducing Latin inscriptions on a laser cutter for my introductory Latin course. Specifically, the intent of this assignment was (1) to produce examples of inscribed Latin which would serve to counterbalance the highly polished and annotated Latin produced in introductory textbooks, (2) to introduce students to inscribed voices from across the socio-economic spectrum and to the official language of Roman institutions like the Senate, imperial offices, and the military, and (3) to expose students to the complex process of reading these documents. To complete these objectives, I intended to work with personnel in the Makerspace Laboratory at Temple

University's Loretta C. Duckworth Scholars Studio to produce a set of documents for my students to read and translate. Documents would be produced either on sheets of Baltic birch or on white acrylic.

I adjusted my original objectives as I put my project into practice during the fall semester. Whenever my Latin class began a new chapter in our course text, *Suburani*, I introduced Latin inscriptions that complemented textbook material and language objectives. When *Suburani* incorporated readings and digital media on Roman religion or the military into language lessons, for instance, I distributed laser-cut examples of votive dedications, military diplomas, and legionary inscriptions. Students then discussed the appearance of these documents such as their size, lettering, and grammar, and how they can serve to comment on the socio-economic status of the subject of the inscription and the substance of the text itself. Several times during the fall semester, I created inscriptions for students 1.) to record what they see on the laser cut material and 2.) to translate the inscription (with the aid of epigraphic notations). My original intent was to have each student translate a separate document, but students felt more comfortable working in groups. This was a far more effective way to carry out this activity because students could collectively harness their introductory knowledge and received a boost in confidence by working together. Students were able to see major differences in grammar and vocabulary from the Latin in their textbooks and from historical documents.

In addition to formal class work and translation assignments, I expanded the use of these laser cut documents as a method to advertise Temple's Latin language program to Classics and other undergraduate students alike. First, I created laser cut documents in white acrylic to replicate the coloration of documents that were originally inscribed in marble. Students then worked in groups to paint the laser cut letters with red acrylic paint. This matched the appearance of ancient inscriptions when they were erected in Rome. Second, I created a small set of Latin laser cut documents which I then cut a second time with a puzzle pattern to create a jigsaw puzzle out of the inscription. Students had to assemble the pieces of the Latin inscription, and, following this, translate the document. This exercise was very successful because students used each other's strengths in assembling and translating the text.

The last and most expensive assignment the Pedagogy Award financed was one where my *Ancient Greek History* students carved ancient Greek documents onto marble *stelai*. The logistics of creating this assignment were quite difficult even with advanced planning. I worked with a local marble and granite company in South Philadelphia (Angelo's Marble & Granite Inc.) to procure 15 slabs of white marble cut to the dimensions of 18"x 24" x 1.5" for \$1,300. This process alone took four months. I then secured space in Temple's metal-working shop in the Tyler School of Art for student workspace. This workshop contains copious storage for the marble slabs, adequate ventilation for safety, and supervision for working students should they require help moving equipment or slabs. Before my students carved on these marble slabs, I purchased and tested stone-carving equipment. I purchased one complete set of stone carving tools to familiarize myself with the feel, use, and tool marks that rasps and curved, flat, and pointed chisels left on a stone surface. Once I felt confident using these tools, I decided that a 3/4" flat chisel was the most appropriate tool for carving ancient Greek letters for this exercise, so I ordered five 3/4" flat chisels, 5 hammers, a set of 5 meter sticks and 5 charcoal pencils for marking the marble *stelai*, and safety equipment of KN-95 masks and protective eyeglasses for each student. This safety equipment would prevent injury from stone chips as well as protect students from breathing marble dust created from carving.

Students were divided into five groups which each received a set of equipment: masks and safety glasses, a marble slab, meter stick, charcoal pencil, hammer, and chisel. Each group then received an edited Greek text of an Athenian decree which I pulled from the Packard Humanities Searchable Greek Inscriptions Website that was adapted so that line numbers were removed and the spacing altered to make it appear like a page of text. These inscriptions are also edited with capitalization and punctuation, so students first had to convert the text back into capital letters. Once I checked their texts to ensure accuracy, students then had to divide the surface of their marble slabs using the meter sticks and charcoal pencils into stoichedon blocks so that the text of their inscriptions could fit. To aid in the division of text into a stoichedon pattern, I distributed graph paper for the students to copy the text of their inscriptions for visual reference. Students then began to carve their texts and were required to document their work by photography or video. Once finished, they are responsible for painting the letters red and for transporting the inscriptions over to the Classics department to be set up and "published."

Upon turning in their inscriptions, students will write an essay where they reflect on their experience in producing an inscription and draw larger connections on the role and importance of literacy in ancient Greek political life.

I am grateful for this award as it provided my students critical, hands-on skills for reproducing ancient materials and skills that ancient historians still use today. They have come away with a much greater understanding of ancient technology and the importance of literacy and communication in the ancient world. These assignments helped students engage with myself and with one another and helped retention in my future classes. I intend to keep using these materials so long as I can for future classes as they present a proven method for increasing knowledge and interest in Greco-Roman antiquity.

Respectfully,



Michael McGlin  
Assistant Professor of Classics (Instructional)