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Strengthening a Classics Department with Ancient History

I. Introduction

In this paper, I will discuss how a Classical Studies department can use an array of offerings in ancient history as a means of boosting enrollments and maintaining a central place in the undergraduate curriculum. One of our major concerns in our department is to adapt to changes in higher education generally and changing conditions at Tulane to make sure that we maintain high enrollments. Ancient history courses play a key role in this effort. They provide a core around which other courses in antiquity can be organized, including in archaeology, religion, and literature. My observations will be based on my own long experience in the Classical Studies department at Tulane University, a highly selective private university. I would imagine that much of what I say will be very familiar to many in the audience, but I also know that I can learn a lot from what colleagues at other institutions do. I hope what I will say will provide a starting point for discussion.

II. Background

Tulane University is a highly selective private university. We have an undergraduate student population of approximately 6,500 students, with an incoming freshman class of about 1,600. As appears to be a nationwide phenomenon, larger numbers of students are opting for pre-professional undergraduate training: our business school has long had a large share of our undergraduate student body, but in recent years it has gained a great deal in enrollments at the expense of liberal arts and possibly also the sciences. In addition, a lot of our students pursue majors in public health and in international development, which have both been added relatively recently as undergraduate majors. To some extent the preference of students for these latter two majors is a product of Tulane's emphasis on public service since Hurricane Katrina. In more general terms, the challenges posed by this trend is a

theme that Teresa Sullivan, President of the University of Virginia, addressed in the presidential panel on the future of the liberal arts in higher education. I think part of the solution for us, to the extent possible, to recognize the career concerns of students but to work to construct curricula in such a way as to make it possible for students to pursue double majors.

As far as Tulane's general curriculum is concerned, it is fairly basic, leaving lots of room for double majors. Many of my department's majors are double majors, in a large number of fields, including neuroscience, which is now a favorite major of pre-med students. In addition, at Tulane, many of the students who major in public health and international development also pursue second majors in liberal arts departments at Tulane. With business things are a bit more complicated, since the current structure of the business major precludes a double major, unless the student takes many extra credits and pursues a double degree (we had a student who did this two years ago).

Our undergraduate curriculum at Tulane may be in for a substantial change: a task force, of which I am a member, is planning to propose a revision of our undergraduate curriculum this spring. The focus of this will likely be on an increased emphasis on writing, with sophomore-level and junior-level writing courses. I think this is something that Classical Studies departments are well equipped to offer.

III. Tulane's Classics Department

At my university, we have long been in the fortunate position of being able to offer a wide array of courses in ancient history. When I was first appointed, my job was to teach courses in Latin and in Roman history, which I shared with a colleague in the History Department, who teaches both Greek and Roman history. In recent years, our Classical Studies department has added two additional tenure-track faculty members with research and teaching in classical and Hellenistic Greek history. We have always had faculty members in Greek and Roman archaeology, and, in addition,

over the past several years, visiting faculty with interests in material culture and in ancient religion. The result is that, every semester, we are able to offer courses in various levels in both Greek and Roman history, and our faculty are able to teach fairly specialized classes. Certainly some of us have become very adept at presenting what could be viewed as specialized topics to a broad undergraduate audience. Right now we have six tenured or tenure-track faculty, one tenured faculty member who has a half-time administrative appointment, an instructor with a long-term appointment, and a visiting assistant professor, as well as several people teaching courses as adjuncts. Three of us have research and teaching interests that are primarily in literature, two in archaeology, and three in ancient history. Our visiting assistant professor has interests in both archaeology and ancient history. Our offerings in ancient history count toward the History major, whereas his offerings count towards our major. We coordinate the scheduling of our offerings in ancient history with the History department.

We offer majors in Latin, Greek, and Classical Studies. Most of our majors are in Classical Studies: a long time ago, we made a decision to establish a Classical Studies major without any language requirement, but with a focus on ancient history, archaeology, and religion. At that time we had a faculty member in the department teaching ancient Judaism, and we soon added someone to teach early Christianity. In recent years circumstances have led our department to shift away from offering courses in Judaism and early Christianity. We had some success in integrating courses in these fields with our other offerings in classical studies, but the fit was not perfect. Our focus on classical studies as opposed to the languages has helped us to keep a relatively healthy number of majors over the years, and has made us an attractive option for students in the sciences who want a double major. My department's focus in ancient history and other classical studies courses does have some costs, since the time that our faculty devote to ancient history and ancient material culture necessarily subtracts from what we can devote to language training. Consequently, most of our departmental majors follow the track that does not require language, and we have a much smaller number of Latin and Greek

majors. This situation has not compromised our ability to prepare students for graduate school in classical philology, but it does pose challenges for preparing students for graduate work in ancient history. We certainly would like to be able to recruit more students for our language courses, since we believe that such courses are essential to the field.

IV. Course schedules

Each semester, we offer an array of courses in Greek and Roman history at a variety of levels, including broad introductory courses, smaller mid-level seminars, and upper-level seminars, which also count as graduate courses for our small MA program. Most of our courses include a significant writing component. In addition to our upper-level seminars (4000-level), in recent years we have been offering a 3000-level seminar designed to provide students with in-depth training on how to write research papers. These courses are similar to what is proposed for our new curriculum.

As one can see from the schedules reproduced below, in the fall 2013, we an introductory Roman history course on the Republic, a survey course on the Roman Empire, and archaeology course on Pompeii, two mid-level courses on Greek history, and a senior “capstone” seminar whose focus was historical. Our upper-level courses (4000-level) were on art historical or archaeological topics. Our colleague in history also offered an introductory Greek history course.

In the spring 2014, we are offering two sections of our introductory Roman history course, as well as courses on Roman family law, Judaism in the Greco-Roman world (which will also count for the Jewish Studies major), and seminars on Greek warfare and ancient slavery. In addition, we will offer a number of archaeology courses.

Another complication: as part of our restructuring after Hurricane Katrina the university has placed a great emphasis on public service, and many Tulane students are very interested in this. One aspect of this emphasis is to require each student to take two service-learning classes. This requirement is controversial among the

Tulane faculty, and it is difficult for our Center for Public Service to find enough community partners to accommodate all our students. Providing service learning courses is especially a challenge for humanities departments, but in our department we have considered it essential that we be involved in this, both to provide opportunities for our students and to keep ourselves front and center in the curriculum. So far we have been able to offer service learning courses that involve archaeological preservation (in connection with some of our archaeology courses), and also volunteering with legal clinics and shelters (in connection with my Law of the Family course). In addition, we often offer service learning with one-credit courses that some of us teach to first-year students (TIDE courses).

V. To return to ancient history, our ability to offer so many courses in ancient history places us in a very fortunate situation, but it also presents challenges. One challenge is that most of the students we teach, particularly in our larger courses, are not our majors; many students choose our courses to fulfill general education requirements. Consequently, it is difficult for us to assume knowledge in more advanced courses, or to sequence courses to provide a more rigorous major. An added complication is that, quite often, our majors do not know one another very well, and in fact often we will have majors graduate whom members of the department have never taught. We have tried to overcome the lack of a cohort among our majors by re-activating an undergraduate classics club, and this has helped.

At the same time, we face the challenge of balancing our Classical Studies offerings with traditional language courses, which remain absolutely essential for preparing students for graduate school. However, we have been able to offer upper-level ancient history courses that depart from traditional political narratives to explore issues in Greek and Roman society and economy. These courses allow us to introduce our students to some of the central debates in the field of ancient history, and they enrich our offerings. Moreover, we have had a steady stream of students writing honors thesis, in Latin, Greek, and classical studies. One measure of our

success is that in each of the last two years one of our honors thesis students has won a university-wide award for the outstanding student selected for Phi Beta Kappa. Some years ago we had a student who won the women's studies prize because of her honors thesis on factors affecting women's health in the ancient world.

VI. Another challenge is that our tenured and tenure-track faculty do not teach our introductory Latin courses, although they do teach the Greek ones. Tulane has a three-semester language requirement, and the first two semester of this are often in the hands of graduate teaching assistants, under the supervision of a professor. Regular faculty do often teach the third semester in the sequence. We have not been completely successful at building up interest in Latin among our undergraduates; the fourth-semester courses and higher have generally modest enrollments, and our small enrollments in these courses are compensated by our large enrollments in courses in translation.

VII. One interesting observation during the past several years is that we have not been losing majors, even as the School of Liberal Arts and the School of Science and Engineering have been losing majors to business and public health. I think the reason for this is that the students who major in our subject tend not to be ones who would consider business. That having been said, we had an honors student who wrote a thesis on Ptolemaic Egypt several years ago who also pursued a business degree in finance.

Tulane Department of Classical Studies

Classical Studies offerings in ancient history and archaeology. In parentheses are the enrollments (for the spring the enrollments were current at the beginning of the semester).

I. Fall 2013

CLAS 1010-01, Rise of Rome (enrollment: 48), Notarian

CLAS 3020, High Roman Empire (30), Kehoe

CLAS 3190, Pompeii: Life in a Roman Town (35), Notarian

CLAS 3310, Tyrants and Democrats in Ancient Greece (9), Butler [emphasis on writing]

CLAS 3320, The Greek Way of Death (33), Butler

CLAS 3810, Greek History from the Persian Wars to Alexander the Great (9), Boehm

CLAS 4130, Egypt under the Pharaohs (30), Carter

CLAS 4200, Ancient Painting and Mosaics (13), Lusnia [writing intensive]

CLAS 4900, Capstone: Individuals and Communities in Antiquity (9), Kehoe

HISA 1000, Ancient Near East and Greece, Harl

Spring 2014

CLAS 1010, Rise of Rome, 2 sections (90 students)

CLAS 2320, Greek Temples and Festivals (50), Butler

CLAS 3090, Law and Society in Ancient Rome (50), Kehoe

CLAS 3120, Etruscans & Early Rome (22), Lusnia

CLAS3170, Greek Art and Archaeology (25), Carter

CLAS 3180, Roman Art and Archaeology (40), Notarian

CLAS 3810, Jews in the Greco-Roman World (22), Boehm

CLAS 4080, Ancient world Slavery and Society (23), Kehoe

CLAS 4200, The Roman Villa (20), Notarian

CLAS 4320, War and Power in Ancient Greece (10), Butler

HISA 6010, The Later Roman Empire (14), Harl