

MÉΛI NUCESQUE

A Newsletter for Classics at the University of Dallas

From the Chair

Dr. Teresa Danze
Associate Professor, Chair, Classics

Welcome to another edition of Mèlì Nucesque! This past fall, after a productive sabbatical in the spring, I took on the responsibility of Chair from the indefatigable David Sweet, who kindly did not reveal how fast or unforgivably the chair-carousel travels. My hope is that we will maintain our reputation for strong language education while preparing our students for competitive graduate programs and fields outside of classics. We have for the past few years been able to offer partial funding for students participating in the Gabii dig with Dr. Robinson and now offer scholarships annually for enrolled Classics majors thanks to generous donations from Classics alumni. The Classics majors and concentrators continue to average 30 in number while an even greater number takes our Core language classes. In the fall we had over 220 students in a language or culture course, the largest number since Dr. Sweet started keeping records. Plautus, Vergil, Apuleius, and Augustine, Pindar, Greek Lyric and New Testament writers were all on tap this year and we hope to maintain our Greek course in Rome provided funding is available. This coming year will see the return of an old course - Fundamentals of Rhetoric with Dr. Kosch - in which masters of oratory, from Demosthenes to Churchill will be read in translation, we will celebrate the career of Dave Davies at a retirement party, and host speakers on Roman Lyric and Thucydides style to commemorate the life of Karl Maurer. Watch for updates about a new initiative with DFW high schools that will celebrate antiquity through competitive fun and engaging talks on our campus.

It delights us to learn of your adventures - please let us know where you are and what you are up to so we can toast to your futures during our staff meetings. If you would like to be included in our alumni page on the Classics website, send a photo and a brief bio to our Classics Research Assistant, Maria Miller, at classicsdepartment@udallas.edu



Newest inductees to Eta Sigma Phi: (from left to right) Maria Miller, Ava Van Schaick, Owen Embree, and John Dougherty

Departmental News

Eta Sigma Phi Inductions

Congratulations to our junior and senior Classics students **Ava Van Schaick, John Dougherty, Maria Miller, and Owen Embree**, who were recently inducted into the Eta Lambda chapter of Eta Sigma Phi, the Classics honors society! Members, maintaining above a 3.4 GPA, are able to apply for scholarships and funding and to submit papers for presentation at the annual Society for Classical Studies convention.

Translation Exams

CAMWS Exams

The Classical Association of the Middle West and South holds a yearly International Latin Translation Exam in which our students always perform well. Congratulations to our UD winners from the 2023-2024 Advanced Exam competition:

- **Cash Award Winners:** John Dougherty, Bethany Kaufman
- **Book Award Winners:** Owen Embree, Ben Olster, Martin Lane
- **Certificates of Commendation:** Samuel Korkus, Joseph Teson, Myra Main, Amanda Beaver, Helena Walz

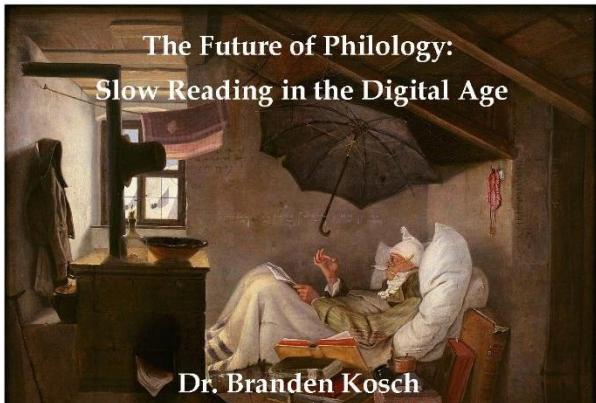
Eta Sigma Phi Exams

Eta Sigma Phi holds its yearly Maurine Dallas Watkins Sight Translation Contest in both Greek and Latin. Congratulations to our winners from UD's Eta Lambda chapter:

- **Advanced Greek Winners:** John Dougherty and Owen Embree tied for 2nd place, and Benjamin Olster came in 3rd place
- **Intermediate Greek Winner:** Peter James received Honorable Mention
- **Advanced Latin Winner:** Martin Lane came in 3rd place

Faculty Talks

The wonderful Dr. Branden Kosch gave a talk on Thursday, April 24 on “The Future of Philology: Slow Reading in the Digital Age.” Thank you to all our attendees as we continue to showcase the outstanding minds of our Classics faculty!



Alumna Spotlight

By Rebecca Deitsch, guest contributor



Rebecca Deitsch received her BA in Classical Philology from UD in 2017 and her PhD in Classical Philology from Harvard University in 2023. Over the past 6 years she has taught Classics courses at Harvard, Kenyon, and Wellesley, and in her spare time she runs a website for Latin learners (booksnbackpacks.com). This summer she will begin a new position as Assistant Professor of Classical Languages & Literatures at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts.

Comprehension before Translation: Let's Rethink How We Read Latin and Greek!

Ancient languages are languages, too!!! You may roll your eyes and think: “Duh! Of course languages are languages. What’s your point?” But anyone who compares practices in the average Latin classroom and, say, the average Spanish classroom can appreciate the stark differences in method and goal. Ancient languages are languages, but they are not typically *taught* or *learned* like other languages.

While Spanish teachers usually advocate for a communicative approach, most Latin teachers cling to the grammar-translation method. Spanish students are taught to speak, read, and comprehend **in Spanish**; Latin students are taught to analyze sentences (identifying cases, parsing verb forms, etc.) and translate **into English**. As a result, “reading” Latin is a slow and arduous process for most, a painstaking grammatical analysis that resembles decoding a puzzle.

If you picked up a book in Latin or Greek, how long would it take you to read ten pages? The answer, even for advanced students, is typically hours and hours, if not days. But if you *can’t* read ten pages in one sitting, is it even reading at all? I am not trying to make anyone question their language skills, but I *do* want to encourage you to rethink how you approach ancient languages. UD includes texts such as Sophocles’ *Antigone* and Vergil’s *Aeneid* in the Core Curriculum because of their moving content: shouldn’t we strive to read them in Greek and Latin just like we read in English? Let’s not be satisfied with mechanical parsing and hasty recourse to translation – instead let’s aim for true appreciation **in Greek and in Latin**.

News flash: Greek and Latin are inherently comprehensible! They aren’t mysterious codes to be deciphered with a dictionary and grammar book, but rather systems of communication. Translation can be an excellent tool, but it is not our only way of accessing the meaning of ancient languages. Let’s seek comprehension *before* translation!

I can pinpoint the exact moment when my personal approach to ancient languages shifted. I was in my first year at UD and taking Lucretius with Dr. Sweet. We had the choice of writing a term paper or memorizing 50 lines of Latin, and I chose the memorization. One evening I wandered around campus in the rain, reciting Lucretius and struggling with my umbrella. *Aeneadum genetrix, hominum dirumque voluptas . . .* The words flowed past and suddenly I thought: “Why can’t I understand this Latin that I am reciting?” An array of excuses jumped into my mind – Latin word order is weird, we have to puzzle out the endings, etc. – but I couldn’t accept these justifications. I had experience reading Polish epic poetry, which is blessed with the same adventurous syntax and inflectional overload as Latin. And yet I instinctively understood Polish . . . I didn’t have to translate into English. My mind had learned how to process

Polish in its natural word order, without resorting to strategies such as “hunt-for-the-verb” and “find-the-subject”.

Standing in the rain in Irving, 18-year-old me had a revelation: “I want to be able to read Latin and Greek as effortlessly as I read Polish!” That was the moment when I stopped decoding and started *understanding*. As I continued reciting Lucretius, I tried to picture what was happening and imbue meaning into every syllable. This focus on comprehension became my process in all my Latin and Greek courses at UD. After analyzing a tough sentence, I would go back and reread it in Latin or Greek as many times as it took for the meaning to stick in my head WITHOUT translating into English. All because of reciting Lucretius in the rain – thanks, Dr. Sweet!

“ News flash: Greek and Latin are inherently comprehensible! They aren’t mysterious codes to be deciphered with a dictionary and grammar book, but rather systems of communication. ”

Reading Greek and Latin entails so much more than mere grammatical analysis. Don’t misunderstand me: grammar is important (and fun!!!). Grammar is essential for learning any second language, but the goal is for grammatical information to be processed automatically so that we can appreciate ancient literature.

A few years ago I took a graduate seminar at UMass-Boston on second language acquisition (SLA) theory in the classroom. SLA research investigates how humans acquire a second language, so it is a field of studies with obvious applications for language learners and teachers everywhere. SLA theory recognizes that meaning does not reside solely in a text. Fluent reading is the integration of two types of information processing. In **bottom-up** processes, the reader focuses on the minute details of the text – individual letters and words, case endings, etc. – and gradually constructs larger and larger units until the entire text is understood. In **top-down** processes, on the other hand, the reader uses their own prior knowledge and expectations to make predictions based on the content of the text. For instance, you might have some experience with language learning in the United States; you certainly have the experience of fluent reading in your native language. This background information helps you to comprehend my words better. As you read this article, even if you don’t realize it, your brain is constantly

making predictions and revising expectations to promote easier comprehension.

Greek and Latin students often rely exclusively on bottom-up processes (parsing, hunting for the verb, etc.) and forget about the big picture meaning of the passage they are “reading”. But they miss out on one of the best parts of learning a new language: experiencing contact with a new culture and new ideas. Theoretically, we learn ancient languages because we believe ancient texts still have value for us today: so shouldn’t we aim for the lofty goal of true comprehension? I repeat: reading is so much more than grammatical analysis, and we should start acting like it!

All this is much easier said than done, but shifting your mindset is the first big step. Don’t be satisfied with a more-or-less logical translation of a Greek or Latin sentence. Instead, go back to the original and reread it as many times as it takes for the meaning to sink in. As a final point, I urge all Latin students to check out the booming genre of Latin novellas (short books written by Latin teachers for Latin students). Reading easier texts is a fantastic way to strengthen your knowledge of grammar and vocabulary and to start to automatize comprehension. Novellas will show you that you *can* comprehend Latin without translation – you just need more practice!

Study Resources

Do you want to practice your Latin and Greek reading skills? Are you interested in delving more into Classics but don’t know where to start? Do you desperately need to find sources for your Classics Thesis or a term paper? Are you just looking for a quiet and cozy place to study?

The solution to all these problems can be found in our **Classics Reading Room** in Anselm 216. You can find an hour to meet with a tutor there (check out our website for more information!), or you can go study there independently. Take advantage of a good ambience, a cozy armchair, and shelves full of great Classical resources! See you in there!

