Mission Statement

The graduate program in Classics is primarily a doctoral program, although students are occasionally admitted for the M.A. We are a medium-sized department committed to training our graduate students to the highest standards in our field in both research and teaching.

We teach across the spectrum of Classical Studies, from Homer to late antiquity. In accord with leading-edge trends in our field, at the graduate level we emphasize an interdisciplinary approach to the study of Greek and Roman antiquity: faculty and students draw on intellectual resources throughout the Humanities (e.g., Anthropology, History, Women’s Studies, Religion, Art History, Philosophy, Socio-Linguistics, Gender Studies, Rhetoric). We have focused hiring faculty to create complementary areas of specialization (ancient Greek and Roman Religion, Late Antiquity, and the Classical Tradition), and this cohesion distinguishes our program.

We are distinguished both in the University of Iowa and among peer Classics programs for placing 100% of our graduates in the last ten years in Classics-related jobs. Our success can be attributed to the fact that we place special importance on closely mentoring graduate students, a goal that was particularly recognized in our department’s last external/internal review (2006). The committee noted that our students “were being well groomed for success,” and “were being well prepared to enter the job market in a timely fashion especially by being encouraged to develop portfolios, having their teaching carefully monitored and assessed and attending conferences.”

Our aim is to recruit and train highly qualified and diverse students, and the department’s rise in national and international visibility, especially in the last twenty years, has resulted in a year-by-year increase in student demand and in the quality of applications.

Admission Processes and Criteria

The admissions process is administered by the Graduate Affairs Committee, which consists of the entire graduate faculty. In making decisions about admissions we look at students’ academic potential as measured by GPA, GRE scores, letters of recommendation, language preparation in Greek and Latin, and general fit with our program’s areas of specialization. We recruit excellent students through our national reputation, our graduate alumni, who in their teaching positions continue our undergraduate tradition of training students in the most rigorous standards, our website, whose excellence was recognized in 2008 by the UI webpage, and by on-campus visits. In this regard, the 2006 review committee noted that they were “especially impressed by the level and amount of attention [recruits] had received from faculty and [current] Graduate Students” while visiting our campus. We successfully compete for excellent students with graduate programs in our peer CIC group and with research universities across the country. A recent illustration of how well we compete with departments of the highest ranking is reflected by the fact that a 2008 recipient of the UI Presidential Fellowship chose our program over Cornell’s.

In 2004-07 (the time period represented by the data issued by the Graduate College) we received an average of 14 graduate applications annually, admitting an average of 8 for the Ph.D. and 2 for the M.A., yielding an average overall of 83% of those admitted. The relatively high admittance rate is due to the quality of applicants (see below). In the past 3-4 years we have seen an even greater increase in number and quality of applications. We currently have 18 graduate students enrolled in our program. Our entering students stand out among all UI graduate programs in terms of the traditional markers of academic potential. From 1996-2007 the average GPA of our entering students was 3.71 compared to 3.54 for UI Humanities and 3.45 for all UI graduate programs). In the same period the average GRE scores (V + Q + A) were 1803, compared to the1762 average for UI Humanities programs in general, and the 1713 average for all UI graduate programs.

In terms of diversity our program recruits roughly the same number of female and male students. We have been particularly successful in relation to other Classics programs in recruiting underrepresented groups. Two of our current students are recipients of the Graduate College’s Dean’s Fellowship.

Graduate students in our department are mostly supported by .5 TAships, mostly in our department, but also in the Rhetoric Department. We support a smaller number of students (3 per year) with .5 RA-ships supported by Graduate College SIF funding for work on our department’s journal, Syllecta Classica. These graduate student editorships are highly successful professional training and mentoring programs in which the journal’s faculty editor trains the students in all the steps of creating and
revising a scholarly manuscript. Each year some of our best applicants express interest in SC. These editorial positions both distinguish our graduate program and help place our students in excellent jobs. We support MA students for two years and Ph.D. students for six years.

We have been very successful in recruiting a high number of excellent students through fellowship opportunities supported by the Graduate College. From 2004-2008 the Graduate College offered our applicants five (of the five nominated) Presidential Graduate Fellowships, of which three were accepted. In the same time period we offered three Dean’s Graduate Fellowships, two of which were accepted. From 2006-2008 our department nominated two Ballard Seashore Fellows; both were offered and accepted.

Program Outcomes

Our department’s close mentoring of graduate students has paid off in terms of degree completion. From 1994-2000 61% of students entering for the Ph.D. (16) and the M.A. (2) completed their degree, compared to 51% in UI Humanities programs overall (from 1996-2000). Of the students who entered in 1994 and were awarded the Ph.D. by 2008, the median time to degree was 7.8 years, compared to 7.3 years for UI Humanities programs overall (in the years 1996-2008).

These statistics for degree completion and time to degree are particularly impressive given the demands of a Classics degree. In line with other Ph.D. granting Classics programs, our Ph.D. candidates must take eight exams over four years, testing their training in ancient Greek, Latin, ancient History, history of literature, material culture, Greek and Roman Art History, as well as exams in French and German, with two additional years allotted for completing their dissertation. The course of study is rigorous and we are unique among Ph.D.-granting institutions for training our students as well to fill a need particular to liberal arts institutions in the Midwest and South, where they are mostly hired. These institutions need faculty who are prepared for work integrally as researchers, teachers, and for a wide range of academic service. Due to our training our students have been chosen for the last three years to run the National Teaching Workshop for two national Classics associations, and they are regularly responsible at our regional conference for organizing panels introducing graduate students to major job preparation issues.

We train our students well, so that they are set up to receive excellent jobs. Given these demands, that the time to degree is so low may be attributed to a close mentoring system, supervised by the DGS, that efficiently guides students through their coursework and exams. Graduate course work is closely linked to the students’ plan of study and training in their areas of specialization. Faculty mentoring in courses and advanced individual study requirements encourages scholarly excellence and timely progress.

In spite of our excellent record we are committed to decreasing the time to degree even more. To this end we have in the last two years instituted a Graduate Checklist, which is a contract between entering students and the DGS, listing course, exam, and dissertation requirements by year. We anticipate that this even closer supervision and accountability will reduce the time to degree significantly.

As the data discussed above indicates, our graduate students have been highly successful in qualifying for University funding opportunities. They have been equally successful in pursuing external funding and award opportunities. In the last five years, one student was granted a highly competitive full scholarship for a year’s study at the American School of Classical Studies in Athens (the American archaeological presence in Greece). Another received a fellowship for an archaeological dig in Turkey. Another won a fellowship to study Latin in Rome. We actively encourage these opportunities for students to enrich and broaden their graduate studies.

Our department also encourages scholarly excellence by means of an endowed yearly competition for scholarly papers, the Peter Green Essay Prize. Our doctoral students have a well-earned fame among peer departments for the number of papers they present at regional and national professional meetings. Each year between three and five students (out of a class of 15-18) present papers at these venues. We mentor their presentation skills by sponsoring “dry runs” of the paper presentations in the department.

Our department stands out both in UI departments and in departments nationally for placement of graduate students. Since 1994 we have placed 100% of our Ph.D. graduates into college/university teaching positions, compared to 82% overall for UI Humanities programs. 55% of these graduates have tenure-track jobs (equal to 55% overall for UI Humanities programs), one with a named chair. All of our M.A. graduates in this time period are teaching Latin at the High School level, which was their career goal.

Program Characteristics
The Department of Classics was one of the four original departments created at the foundation of the University of Iowa in 1847. The Old Capitol reflects in its architecture as well as the tradition of government it embodies the importance Iowans have always attached to the intellectual and artistic inheritance of ancient Greece and Rome. In the twenty-first century, while maintaining our traditional standards, our department engages in research and teaching at the cutting edge of current interdisciplinary trends. The University of Iowa Libraries' holdings in Classics are among the most extensive in the United States; visiting lecturers from prominent universities throughout the world often make a library visit part of their stay.

The Classics Department currently has 6.75 faculty FTE, two lecturers, and one adjunct. As stated above, each year in the past 5-10 years we have seen an increase in applications to our graduate program and in the quality of those applications. Given current FTE, we consider an appropriate entering class to be four to five students. To continue our productive tradition of closely mentoring our graduate students, a graduate population of 20-25 students is appropriate (currently we have 18).

The graduate students in our department contribute significantly to our undergraduate teaching mission. Many of our undergraduate majors come from our first and second year language courses, and graduate students teach many of these courses. Graduate students are closely mentored in their teaching skills (in teaching Latin, from Marcia Lindgren, our Latin Supervisor, and in closely working with professors in large lecture courses). Our graduate students are excellent teachers. In the last ten years they have won 8 Teaching Excellence awards, nearly one per year. We consider the close mentoring and training we provide to be a decisive factor in this success as well as in our success in placing our graduates.

Particularly in the last twenty years, the Department of Classics has attained recognition as a top graduate program among national public universities. The 2006 external/internal review of our department ranked our program high in the CIC, putting it on a par with the Classics programs at the University of Indiana, Northwestern, Illinois and Wisconsin in size, quality, and national standing. Students wishing to pursue graduate research in our areas of specialization are regularly urged to apply by their undergraduate mentors.

The Classics Department’s strengths lie in the commitment of every faculty member to closely mentor and train our students to the highest standards in research and teaching. We prize and cultivate collegiality among faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates. Our graduate students are an equally important resource to the growing success of our program. The 2006 review cited the “especially good job” we do in involving current graduate students in recruiting new graduate students, and noted that our “approach might be taken as a model for other departments.”

Our students are so eager to recruit because they are so satisfied with the program.

The major problem facing our graduate program is lack of resources, particularly in recruiting new students. Just as we are seeing the result of 10-15 years of intensive work to achieve excellence in our overall program and especially in our graduate program, graduate and TA funding is dwindling. In 2009, we had 27 applicants, approximately half of which were of exceptionally high caliber. We were able to admit only one student with funding. Because of lack of funding (in the form typically of TAships) we cannot make timely offers, and we lose the top candidates who have applied to our program for the very areas of specialization we can offer them, since they were funded elsewhere.

Conclusions

Our graduate program stands out nationally for its focused areas of specialization, the close mentoring we offer our students in research and teaching, our exceptional library collection in our field, and our growing reputation, as evidenced by the 2006 review of our program. If the current level of support is increased, our graduate program is poised to consolidate its strength and continue to rise in its already high national standing. Our 100% rate of placement of our graduates as well as the ongoing success of our alumni in their jobs has brought our program distinction. Our faculty and students are committed to the department’s success, and work tirelessly for the ongoing success of the program. Our outlook for the future is brighter than it has ever been.