Assessment of the First Exam – PhD Program in Classics

March 15, 2017

1. **Learning Goal for the First Exam.** “The first examination assesses the student’s ability to translate Greek and Latin literary texts by means of written exams in each language grounded in a reading list approved by the faculty and posted on the Program’s website. These exams demonstrate that a student has achieved the first Program goal: “mastery of the languages of the Greco-Roman world.”

2. **Guidelines for the first exam for students in the philology track.** These are posted on the Program’s website:

   The “First Examination” is taken before the completion of 45 credits. It has two parts which are taken separately and may be taken in any order. These exams are generally offered at the beginning of each semester. When a student passes both parts of the First Examination they are advanced to the second doctoral level. The Executive Officer will circulate an announcement with the dates of the exams at least two months in advance and ask students to sign up in writing. Two faculty members will compose each exam and two other faculty will read them. When a student passes both parts of the First Examination and has completed 45 credits they are advanced to the second doctoral level.

   **The Greek Translation Exam** for the Ph.D. This exam tests the student’s ability to translate from Greek to English. It consists of six passages (three prose and three poetry), each about twenty lines long, with two out of each set taken from the Greek Reading List for Translation – MA & PhD. At the time of the exam, each student selects and translates two prose and two poetry passages. The time limit is three hours. No dictionaries may be used.

   **The Latin Translation Exam** for the Ph.D. This exam tests the student’s ability to translate from Latin into English. It consists of six passages (three prose and three poetry), each about twenty lines long, with two out of each set taken from the Latin Reading List for Translation – MA & PhD. At the time of the exam, each student selects and translates two prose and two poetry passages. The time limit is three hours. No dictionaries may be used.

3. **Guidelines for the first exam for students in the history track.** These are posted on the program’s website. They are the same as the first exam for students in the philology track, but history students take only one translation exam at this time and a written history exam.

   **The Written Examination in the History of Greece and Rome.** “This exam tests the student’s knowledge of both Greek and Roman history. In advance of the exam, students will be provided with 16 questions in these four areas: 1) Archaic and Classical Greece, 2) the Hellenistic East, 3) the Roman Republic, and 4) the Roman Principate. The exam itself will present two questions in each area, and history students should choose one question to write on in each of the four areas. In their answers students should refer to texts included on the History Reading List of Ancient Authors. The History Committee will also provide reading lists of secondary scholarship for each area to guide the students’ preparation. The
time limit is three hours. This exam is offered twice a year at the same time as the translation exams and the same policies covering the announcement, composition and reading of the exam are followed.”

4. **The Assessment process.** The assessment was undertaken by the Program’s Curriculum Committee. Members included Profs. Dee Clayman (EO and Presider), Danielle Kellogg, Kinya Kim, Jennifer Roberts, David Schur, and students Noah Davies-Mason and Chaya Cassano. The committee met in person on Nov. 11, 2016 to discuss how the assessment would be conducted and carried on a discussion by e-mail afterwards.

An open discussion for all the students on this topic was held during their once a semester meeting with the Executive Committee on December 16th, 2016 and the students conducted a survey in March, 2017 to capture a wider sample of student opinion.

5. **Findings.** The Committee determined that the translation exams were an appropriate assessment of student success in meeting the first learning goal. It was noted that every Classics PhD Program in the country requires such exams, and in every case these are the first exams that PhD students take. The committee looked at the passing rates in our program over the past five years and were gratified to learn that they were very high. The high passing rate indicates that the students are well prepared, even though some students are naturally anxious about them. Preparation takes the form of courses and seminars with challenging reading assignments in Latin and Greek, the students’ personal reading programs based on the posted reading lists, and our sight-reading workshops. Several students responded in the survey that they would like the program to offer survey courses to help them prepare for the exams, but these are already available to them through the Classics Consortium. Only three issues required discussion: when exactly should students take the exam; what policies should be put in place for students who do not pass on the first try; and whether the reading lists and the questions on the history exam should be updated.

6. **Proposed changes.** 1) On the issue of when the exams should be taken, the committee determined that “before the completion of 45 credits” should be changed to “between 30 and 45 credits.” This better reflects the current practice and might encourage students who procrastinate to take them earlier. 2) On the policy governing failures, the committee concluded that allowing students to fail twice meant that students who were not well qualified for the PhD were retained too long in the program. Both they and the program would be better served if they were counselled out after the second failure. 3) On the current state of the reading lists, the committee determined that both the reading lists and the history questions should be re-examined and where necessary, refreshed.

7. **Next steps.** The review of the reading lists is currently underway, and the history committee, which includes two members of the Curriculum Committee, will review the history reading lists and exam questions.

Respectfully submitted, Dee L. Clayman, EO