



Classics

The basis of western civilisation

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Michelle Sim MA Classics
Archivist, Air Force Museum of New Zealand

Classics is the study of the civilisations of ancient Greece and Rome. These civilisations had an immense influence on the development of western civilisation. Much of our modern language, literature, art and architecture, drama, philosophy, political and legal system is derived from Greece and Rome. Classics aims to understand these cultures, and to appreciate what they achieved and how important they have been in historical terms. At the same time Classics students are challenged to confront the major questions which the Greeks and Romans faced and which humanity has faced down the ages – about human behaviour, human society, ethics, war, politics, religion, indeed the whole meaning and purpose of life.

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Why study Classics?

Greece and Rome lie at the root of western civilisation. To understand anything properly you need to have an appreciation of its origins. In studying the Greeks and Romans we are studying the western roots of our own culture.

Classics is a self-contained inter-disciplinary subject. It has links to almost every other arts subject – anthropology, art history, gender studies, history, languages, philosophy, politics, religious studies, theatre studies. Western medicine and science too have their roots in Greece and Rome.

By studying Classics you will develop your awareness of language, your insight into literature and art, your understanding of history and politics, your knowledge of religion and mythology, your appreciation of ethical and social issues. You will certainly broaden your intellectual and cultural horizons. You will also develop valuable generic skills transferable to the outside world.

Background required

No specialist knowledge is required, as Classical Studies, Greek and Latin are all taught from scratch. If you have done Classical Studies at school, you will find that our first-year courses build on and extend your knowledge. Students who have passed NCEA level 3 Latin are granted direct entry into 200-level papers.

Careers in Classics

Arts degrees are not vocational degrees but provide valuable generic skills in demand in the workplace. For some jobs you may well need further specialist training. However there are plenty of employers who value a well rounded education such as Classics provides. The millionaire financier Sir Robert Jones is fond of saying that he would far rather employ a Classics graduate than a Commerce one. Employers value transferable skills – the ability to think through a problem, to see both sides of a question, to analyse, to present an argument, and to express yourself clearly and fluently.

Recent Classics graduates have made careers not only in school and university teaching but in university administration, foreign affairs, trade

and industry, social welfare, local government, tourism, computing, insurance, law, librarianship, bookselling, publishing, museums and art galleries, fashion and design, broadcasting, journalism, tourism and the theatre. This list emphasises the versatility of Classics graduates.

Student exchange

You may be able to do part of your study overseas through the University's extensive exchange programme or as a postgraduate student.

But, even if you don't, your study of Classics is going to enrich your OE enormously. Students repeatedly tell us after all that study, there is something magic about your first glimpse of the Parthenon by moonlight!

Classics at Otago

Otago's Classics Department was the first established in New Zealand, in 1871.

Your first year of study

At Otago we offer papers in Classical Studies, Greek, and Latin. If you plan to major in Classics in a Bachelor of Arts you can do so with any combination of these three subjects that suits your interests.

Majoring students will need to do at least two of our first-year papers. Classics, Greek and Latin can also be taken as minor subjects. We encourage you to study one or both of the languages.

First year Classical Studies papers introduce you to Greek and Roman archaeology, Roman social history, Greek mythology and Classical etymology.

You can study:

- the art and archaeology of Greece and Rome, from the Minoan period to Classical Athens, and on to ancient Pompeii and the buildings of the late Roman empire
- the social life of the ancient Romans, looking in particular at the experiences of slaves, gladiators and prostitutes

- the myths of Classical Greece, especially their stories about the creation of the cosmos, and the deeds of heroes such as Heracles and Theseus
- words and concepts derived from the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome (Summer School only)

The textbooks that we use for the teaching of Greek and Latin language are designed for beginner students, and they focus on the reading of continuous texts from the outset. Learning the languages is an excellent way to appreciate how the Greeks and Romans perceived the world around them and communicated their values and ideas.

Continuing your studies

At higher levels you can investigate the culture and society of Classical Athens, the conquests of Alexander the Great, and Greek and Roman myths connected with cursed individuals such as Oedipus and his family.

For students interested in ancient history, we have advanced papers on the Roman emperors from Augustus to Nero, on the successors to Alexander the Great's kingdom, and on violence and corruption in the Late Roman Republic (studied via the speeches of Cicero). A paper on the Fall of the Roman Empire examines the archaeological remains from this crucial period of Roman history, and advanced studies of ancient Greek culture are available through our papers on Greek religion and Greek philosophy (looking especially at Socrates and Plato).

For students who want to pursue postgraduate studies in Classics, our Honours programme offers the opportunity to work closely with a lecturer in the department and investigate a topic of your own choice in detail.

Papers in Greek and Latin language are also available at the 200-, 300- and 400-levels.



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PROFILE

Michelle Sim Graduate

"I didn't take Classics at High School. I didn't even begin University with the intention of majoring in Classics, but by the end of my first year at Otago, I had discovered a life-long passion for all things Greek and Roman.

This was due in no small measure to the broad range of quality programmes offered by the Classics Department, which all highlighted the fascinating depth and enduring relevance of the Ancient World. I quickly realised that to understand the Classical tradition was to gain a greater understanding of the present-day world in which we live, and to appreciate the many legacies which we now attribute to the cultures of Ancient Greece and Rome.

Few disciplines can offer the same diversity of subjects as Classics, something I made the most of in my time at Otago. Within a single degree course I had the opportunity to study mythology, language and literature, art and architecture, and social history. Furthermore, I recognised the benefit (and thrill!) of being able to study the ancients in their own language, and so, with the encouragement of the Department, combined both Latin and Greek language with

my developing interest in the history and archaeology of Bronze Age Greece and Classical Rome.

Through my years of studying Classics at Otago, what always stood out to me most about the Department was the consistently high standard of teaching, reflected in the extraordinary degree of support and commitment that all staff display towards their students. No matter what level you are at, they are always on hand to help you realise your goals.

No Classics degree is ever a waste – don't let anyone tell you otherwise! The valuable and diverse skills you acquire – critical analysis, written and verbal communication, and research ability to name but a few – are easily transferred to any number of vocations. In my case, after completing my MA at Otago, I found I was well placed to move into the Museum and Heritage sector. My current job as an Archivist at the Air Force Museum of New Zealand seems a world away from studying the life and times of the Ancient Greeks and Romans, but there is never a day goes by when I do not put into practice those versatile skills gained through Classics."



For questions about
Classics

otago.ac.nz/classics

