

LIBERAL EDUCATION OUTCOMES IN CLASSICAL STUDIES

REPORT ON A MEETING

at

THE CENTER FOR HELLENIC STUDIES, WASHINGTON DC

April 16th 2005

At the suggestion of David Porter of Williams College and Barbara Gold of Hamilton College, and with the hospitable assistance of Gregory Nagy, the Director of Harvard University's Center for Hellenic Studies, on Saturday 16th April 2005 the Teagle Foundation convened a gathering of classicists largely from private, undergraduate colleges. The colleges included Bowdoin, Franklin and Marshall, Hamilton, Ohio Wesleyan, Reed, Rhodes, Skidmore, Union, and Williams. (A list of attendees is appended.) Also in attendance were Susan Beemer, of the American Council of Learned Societies, Rachelle Brooks, of the Center for Assessment of Higher Education at the University of Maryland, Casey Dué, a junior fellow at the Center for Hellenic Studies and assistant professor at the University of Houston, Donna Heiland, Vice President for Program at the Teagle Foundation, and Peter Struck of the University of Pennsylvania. Robert Connor, President of the Teagle Foundation, chaired the meeting.

The discussion concerned a wide range of issues affecting classical studies in higher education and was intended as a preliminary exploration to guide the Foundation in its thinking about possible discipline-based initiatives in its support of more systematic forms of faculty led assessment in liberal education. No formal conclusion was reached, and no specific recommendations were made. By the end of the meeting, however, many of those around the table seemed to agree that it would be useful if three things could be done.

First, it would be helpful to understand what is currently comprised in an undergraduate education in the classics. This includes everything from the names adopted by departments and programs in this field ("Classics" , "Classical Studies" , "The Classics" , "Greco-Roman Studies" , "Ancient Mediterranean Studies" , etc.) to the goals and outcomes, explicit and implicit, that shape teaching in the field.

Second, a longitudinal study of alumni of classical programs, analogous to the "Oberlin Study" of science graduates of liberal arts colleges, could document the career achievements, job satisfaction, and civic engagement of graduates of classical programs. Such material would be helpful in dealing with parents and others who fear that a major in classics may detract from a student's career and other achievements.

Third, while many questions still remained to be resolved at the end of the meeting, a consensus seemed to be emerging on several issues concerning the assessment of the results achieved in a classical education:

- More systematic assessments of undergraduate learning are going to take place as governing boards, accrediting agencies and public expectations about accountability work their way through higher education. It is important, then, for classics and other disciplines in the liberal arts, to see that the forms of assessment adopted are conducive to the goals of liberal education and appropriate to the subject matter taught.
- It is better to be out in front of this movement than to try to catch up after means of assessment have been externally imposed.
- It might be advantageous to classical studies to take the lead in this area, thereby demonstrating to administrators, funders and others, its confidence in the results that could eventually be documented through appropriate means of assessment.
- Any such assessment effort should be faculty led, rather than imposed by others.
- In order to determine whether and how to proceed, classicists (and presumably faculty in other fields as well) need a more detailed understanding of possible means of systematic assessment—the so called "instruments" of assessment currently available or capable of being developed and adapted to classics or other disciplines.
- It is worth taking at least one more step in this area, drawing on the talent around the table including the expertise of Rachelle Brooks and other specialists in the assessment field.

Given its current priorities, the Teagle Foundation is especially interested in the issue of more systematic assessment, and looks forward to possible further steps in this area.

W.R. Connor

April 18th 2005