

Classicists on the Via Electronica*

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Hundreds of classicists travel the information superhighway daily. The Internet, an integral part of that superhighway, is the communications network which joins more than two million computers world-wide over extremely high-speed data circuits. It is the successor to the ARPANet (Advanced Research Projects Agency) built by the Department of Defense. One destination today is the CLASSICS electronic discussion group administered at the University of Washington in Seattle.¹ Much more than just a computer bulletin board (which is not organized around the needs of educators or of specialized disciplines), CLASSICS provides a forum for scholarly exchanges and collective knowledge that has helped advance research, foster collaboration, and even pave the path to success for many of its subscribers.

The CLASSICS list now boasts over 900 members in 25 countries around the world including the Americas, the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia, and Japan, though it came into existence just over two years ago. The majority of these members are Classics professors, and everyone on the list shares an interest in ancient Greek, Latin, and Classical Studies. Conversations on CLASSICS run continuously via electronic mail (e-mail), and in a single week may cover such diverse subjects as literature, the job market and interviewing, course development ideas, and the state of Classics departments. The list also disseminates material of broad concern by announcing conferences and providing summaries after the fact, notifying members of calls for papers, sharing information on electronic resource availability, and submitting information on position openings.

For many members, the list provides invaluable contact with peers at other institutions. One CLASSICS member, Professor Dale Grote of the Uni-

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¹To subscribe to CLASSICS, send the request SUB CLASSICS <your name> to LISTPROC@U.WASHINGTON.EDU. Send problems or questions to Linda Wright at the address LWRIGHT@U.WASHINGTON.EDU.

versity of North Carolina at Charlotte, has both shared much with the other members of the group and benefited greatly from their help. In January 1993, Grote announced to subscribers the availability of his study guide to F. M. Wheelock's *Latin, An Introductory Course*. Chapters of his book were available from the CLASSICS archives using the File Transfer Protocol which is readily available on most large mainframe computers and personal workstations (e.g., Macintoshes and IBM PCs) connected to the Internet. Many faculty on the list transferred the materials to their own computers, used them in their classrooms, and then provided Grote with valuable comments. By December, University Press of America announced that it would be publishing Grote's book, *A Comprehensive Guide to Wheelock's Latin*. The ease and efficiency of communicating with a large number of teaching Classicists played an important role in the book's completion.

As the preceding example illustrates, the Classics professor who is the sole member of his or her department need no longer feel isolated, since the list provides immediate access to faculty at universities around the world. Geographical distances pose no barriers to this online international community, and it is now almost as easy to discuss one's work with a colleague 10,000 miles away as it is with a colleague in the next office. Electronic communication today facilitates collaboration on projects and research such as no previous generation has enjoyed. Indeed, the CLASSICS list has provided many of its subscribers with professional contacts which otherwise would never have come about. At the 1993 APA conference in Washington, D.C., Classicists from all over the United States (and other countries) for the first time met friends with whom they had exchanged electronic messages for months. It was not at all uncommon for CLASSICS members at last year's APA meeting to encounter names familiar to them from the electronic list, and their common experiences on the computer network readily led to wider social networking at the conference. The Classics community is now closer and enjoys a greater atmosphere of collegiality fostered by exchanging scholarly information via e-mail and electronic discussion lists.

An interesting offshoot of scholarly discourse on the CLASSICS list has been the formation of several new, more specialized discussion groups, which are often managed by members of CLASSICS. POET-L is run by Professor Dale Grote and organized around readings of Aristotle's *Poetics*.² Many other CLASSICS members expressed interest in a list dedicated to discussions of the

²To subscribe to POET-L, send the request SUB POET-L <your name> to LISTSERV@UNCCVM.UNCC.EDU. Problems may be addressed to Dale Grote at the address FFL00DAG@UNCCVM.UNCC.EDU.

works of Thucydides, and this list was begun in February 1994 by Professor Dan Tompkins at Temple University.³ This year also saw the first Classics course offered to scholars across the Internet. The Augustine electronic list was an extension of a seminar offered by Professor James J. O'Donnell at the University of Pennsylvania. Nearly 400 students around the world gathered for one semester to study the works of Augustine of Hippo. O'Donnell's "liveware" students posted summaries of each week's classroom discussions, and the network allowed all participants, local and remote, to continue exchanges which were all monitored and mediated by the electronic professor.

Resources pertaining to Classics are announced on the CLASSICS list, as are new electronic journals and current volumes of existing electronic publications. The TOCS-IN project administered at the University of Toronto announces updates of its online table of contents of information in journals of interest to the Classics scholar, along with instructions on how and where these materials may be accessed.⁴ *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, the pioneer among electronic journals, regularly makes the presence of its online trove of book reviews and conference summaries known to CLASSICS members.⁵ *Electronic Antiquity* is an electronic journal published at the University of Tasmania and announced to members of CLASSICS.⁶ Information on current issues of *Scholia*, which publishes scholarly reviews of books of interest to classicists, is also submitted electronically.⁷ Many other projects and databases accessible on the Internet are also announced on the discussion list for the benefit of all subscribers. In addition, members occasionally help each other with computing questions and problems—the most frequently asked question being how to print Greek characters. All material submitted to the list is available to the subscribers by searching through the archives, and a few documents on "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQs) are also available as a service to members.

University professors with high-speed direct-connections to the Internet provided by their institutions are not the only members of the CLASSICS community. Among the other subscribers are staff at university presses, software

³To subscribe to THUC-L, send the request SUB THUC-L <your name> to LISTSERV@VM.TEMPLE.EDU. Problems may be addressed to Dan Tompkins at the address PERICLES@ASTRO.OGIS.TEMPLE.EDU.

⁴TOCS-IN files are available in many ways, e.g. via the gopher server at CCAT.SAS.UPENN.EDU, or ftp to EPAS.UTORONTO.CA.

⁵Subscriptions and requests for further information on BMCR may be obtained by sending e-mail to the editor's address, BMCR@CC.BRYNMAWR.EDU.

⁶For information on subscribing to *Electronic Antiquity*, send e-mail to ANTIQUITY-EDITOR@CLASSICS.UTAS.EDU.AU.

⁷*Scholia* reviews are available via the gopher server at GOPHER.UND.AC.ZA.

providers, high school Latin teachers, and former and current graduate students of Classics. Many of them participate in the discussions by means of slower-speed modems and personal accounts available from local service providers, who offer access to the Internet via standard telephone lines. Several CLASSICS discussions over the past year have focused especially on improved communication between college Classics faculty and high school teachers of Greek and Latin. University professors and graduate students can provide additional support for the high school programs, and much interest has been expressed and many suggestions and ideas have been shared. Through such cooperation, entering freshmen can be better prepared for college Latin courses, and the Classics field as a whole benefits from increased unity among its members at all professional levels. Those who have not entered the field as educators are able to enjoy continued participation in shaping the future of Classics, as well as staying abreast of current developments.

The continual access to so much collective knowledge and experience is perhaps the most valuable asset the discussion group offers its members. Yet, just as in any auditorium of nearly 1,000 attendees, there are occasionally comments or topics which are less satisfying to a majority of the members. Unlike USENet groups, however, the monitored discussion lists benefit from much greater restraint and internal control among its participants. CLASSICS is not strictly a monitored list, but it does have list monitors in the guise of Zeus and Pallas Athena, anonymous professional classicists who offer Olympian commentary, steering discussions toward more fruitful lines of inquiry. A brief welcoming message is also sent to each new subscriber, which contains information on e-mail etiquette and outlines the intent of the CLASSICS list.

Classicists are recognizing the opportunities that the information super-highway offers all travelers and are utilizing its arterials as conduits for information exchange for their own benefit as well as that of the field. As resources become increasingly available over the Internet and scholars all over the world discover the vast opportunities available to them through rapid and far-reaching electronic communication, research skills and the educational process will be redefined. Teaching and learning both are no longer confined to one's local institution.