

Quis docebit doctores? Proposed Models for Change

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BACKGROUND

EACH YEAR, AS IS CLEAR FROM THE PRECEDING PAPERS, the vast majority of our first-year teaching assistants begins to teach with little or no training. They are most commonly assigned to courses in elementary languages, or to lower level “in translation courses” such as Greek or Roman civilization or mythology. But this is paradoxical. In these times fewer students enter college having studied Latin and it is from these very introductory courses that Classics departments must attract majors into our B.A. programs and, after that, to attract these majors into graduate programs or into middle and high school classrooms as teachers. In short, we are putting our least experienced teachers into those very courses upon which the health of our undergraduate programs often depends.

I submit further that for Classics this more dangerous than it is for other disciplines. For example, all pre-med students need introductory biology and it matters little how well trained the teacher is since students know that they must clear this hurdle to go on. They have no where else to go and a Darwinian sense of survival keeps the clientele in place.

But ours is a different field. Like it or not, Classics has been fighting for its academic life since the 1960s when it lost its privileged position in high school and college curricula. Since that time we have labored well. We have fought back. As APA Vice President for Education I was more than pleased by the current willingness of APA members and policy makers to understand that it is a case of “Latin K–G” (Kindergarten through Graduate School); that we are indeed all in the same boat and that a weakness in one level of our discipline surely affects all the others. We have come to understand, then, that the health of Classics is rather like the health of an ecosystem. If our teaching assistants are given incomplete training as teachers it can only hurt all aspects of the field.

The problem of insufficient training for graduate students is widespread. Chapter 8 of the recent *Chicago Handbook for Teachers* (Brinkley) is entitled “Teaching as a Graduate Student” and begins with the following words:

Many, perhaps most, college and university teachers have their first classroom experience as graduate students. They may serve as readers or graders. They may teach discussion sections in a lecture course. . . . Undergraduate education today, for better or worse, relies increasingly on graduate student teaching. And graduate student teachers, in addition to having to deal with all the normal issues that every teacher encounters, have to deal with particular issues related to being a student and a teacher at the same time.

Those issues are complicated by the fact that in many institutions graduate students enter the classroom without any advance training, without very much supervision, and with very limited feedback. For the most part, no one sees you teach other than your students, who—except in course evaluations—are not likely to comment to you on your performance. It is rare for faculty to visit graduate student classes (and very intimidating when they do). In many respects, you are entirely on your own.

This view of the problem is echoed by the 2000 report funded by the Pew Charitable Trust entitled *Re-envisioning the Ph.D.: What Concerns Do We Have?* (Nyquist and Woodford). They stress that new Ph.D.’s tend to come from elite programs but go on to teach at institutions far different from the ones that granted them their doctorate. They therefore enter the teaching field with little experience with and/or sympathy for the true demographics of today’s college student body.

Before moving on to specific suggestions on some solutions to these problems, allow me to reiterate four assumptions that seem, to me, obvious and that underlie my proposals.

1. What happens at one level of Classics affects all levels of Classics.
2. Those hiring our Ph.D. students increasingly scrutinize them as potential teachers. Why do we offer them courses on the basics of research resources and techniques, but none on the basic techniques and resources for teaching?
3. Teaching requires a specific set of skills that are, to a large extent, teachable. Teachers are not, in fact, born. Proclivities and talents and sensitivities may be innate, but technique can be taught and refined. Even Michelangelo served an apprenticeship and Yo Yo Ma took music lessons. And what of those not born with the qualities that contribute to good teaching? Do we not especially owe them training and guidance?
4. Finally, as stated, a growing number of our majors these days comes from students whose first introduction to Latin or Greek occurs at the college level.

It is from these people that we hope to harvest minors, majors, future pre-college teachers, and, yes, future Ph.D.'s. To put untrained teachers before these classes is foolhardy for our long-term well-being. What follows, then, is not merely an argument based on principle, but one of enlightened self-interest.

PROPOSAL

My first formal proposal is predicated on the premise that the entire profession needs to address the training of teachers at all levels. In this forum I will confine myself to a simple proposal: "Every Ph.D.-granting program in Classics should institute formal teacher training for its graduate students and that training should take the form of a teaching-methods course." George Houston has examined the challenges this proposal creates for graduate departments. They are, of course, real. I will simply say this: no matter the cost, we must find a way to do it. Our graduate students deserve it, our undergraduate students deserve it, and the discipline needs it. Fortunately, there are many ways to do provide such a course.

"We have no one to teach it," some may say. Yet all the well intentioned need do is look around. As Miriam Pittenger says, most large universities have a Center for Teaching. These centers will work with a department either to offer a methods course for the department or, best of all, with a faculty member from Classics to create a training program specific to Classics. Failing this, a course might be worked out with the Education department on your campus. Finally, a local high school Latin teacher could easily be engaged to team-teach methods courses. Large campuses too rarely tap this highly skilled and knowledgeable resource. It is no wonder that the K-12 Latin teachers in America often view Ph.D.-granting departments as aloof and elitist. Both sides could benefit from such a liaison.

"Our curriculum is too full," another might say. Yet the proposed course need not be full-time. A wide range of possibilities exists and some formal training is clearly better than none. For example, all new T.A.'s could attend a two- or three-day course prior to their first teaching and then meet, say, once a week after that with the instructor from Classics, experienced T.A.'s, and personnel from the Teaching Center to discuss the particulars of teaching the courses assigned them.

Improved mentoring is another option. In this model, an experienced teacher of proven ability shepherds the young teacher—discussing, observing, and being observed. And experienced T.A.'s are an excellent source of sympathetic mentors for beginning T.A.'s. We might not be able to do everything for our youngest teachers, but we must do something—we must do

more. Whatever we do is better than doing nothing, as some departments do, or doing the bare minimum that, apparently, most departments do.

I am unaware of any department that offers a minor field specialization in the teaching of Classics, in “Classical Pedagogy,” if you will. Yet I would encourage a small number of Ph.D.-granting institutions to consider doing just that. It is common for Ph.D. programs to require special field tests. Mine were in Catullus and the topography of Athens. I have used both in my teaching. I am simply suggesting that there is a market for producing Ph.D.’s in Classics who have a minor field specialization in Classical Pedagogy. Not every program could, would, or should do this. Much would depend on what resources were available. Is there a resident expert in pedagogy? Is there a Teaching Center or School of Education on campus? Are there local high school teachers who could cooperate? Given some of these resources a minor field concentration could easily be created.

And I submit that there is a viable market for the products of those programs that do inaugurate such a plan. Each year more and more Classics departments hire a junior person to coordinate an undergraduate Latin sequence and some, though not enough, need someone to mentor their T.A.’s.

Let me now turn to some data. When I have raised this subject with peers, I have often heard a rather predictable line. Let me take a trick from Professor Arrowsmith and invent a dialogue here. The protagonist is the author. My partner in conversation is a full professor at an important Ph.D.-granting institution. He is, say, 55–60 years old, which means that he received his training during the 60s. We will call him Professor Oldfarthing.

KK: Prof. Oldfarthing, why is it that your institution has no training program in place to help your teaching assistants learn how to teach?

OLDFARTHING: Now look here—teaching is fine. It is important. I take great pride in it. But, come now, lad, be realistic. It is simply not what we need to train our students to do. Our job is to train them to do research and to publish. That is what they will be judged on. That is what will bring them tenure. And if they don’t get tenure they won’t be teaching anyway, now will they? And what kind of seminars can they teach if they do not have every bit of scholarly technique we can teach them?

KK: What about teaching at a non-college level? Or what about Ph.D.’s who go to institutions that value teaching as highly as research?

OLDFARTHING: I’m not really sure such places exist. And even if they do, are they what we should be aiming at? This institution is devoted to furthering the body of knowledge in our field. Our students carry the image of this department out into the world of academia. To waste time on pedagogy that could be spent on another seminar is doing these

young men and women a grave disservice and I'll have none of it. Good day, sir!

Oldfarthing's argument is based on a view of the Ph.D. and the job market that is woefully out of date.

Let's look at the data. (I wish to thank Adam Blistein and his staff for helping me amass this data by gathering together for me the job placement data in Classics as evidenced by the positions-filled announcements listed in the *APA Newsletter* since June of 1997.) Let us look at what the data have to tell us. Note, please, that I have only reported on institutions located in the United States. The Carnegie Rankings (see below) are entirely domestic, and since I am trying to track actual jobs, I have not counted post-doctoral positions or fellowships. I did not discriminate either by length of job (the one year replacement is all too prevalent these days) or by the rank of the job. I must admit anecdotally, however, that the number of lectureships seems alarmingly high.

My first intent was to ascertain the type of institution to which our Ph.D.'s were going. I turned, therefore, to the Carnegie Foundation's ranking of institutions,¹ which sorts accredited degree-granting institutions of higher education into six categories, with one group, which I will call "group A," representing large research institutions, and another, which I will call "group E," representing small liberal arts colleges. The Carnegie Foundations' other categories represent steps to and away from these paradigms. What did the study reveal?

During the time period in question a total of 166 institutions reported to the APA a total of 334 hires. Seventy-eight of the institutions were, in fact, group A schools. Professor Oldfarthing seemed to be winning out. These 78 institutions represented 47% of all the institutions hiring and their 183 positions represented a full 55% of the jobs to be had during that period. So, Oldfarthing could claim, almost half of the schools hiring were in group A and over half of all the actual jobs were in group A institutions. But, as is often stated, statistics are tricky things.

The names of a few of these schools caught my eye. Many had hired lustily over the years but I knew for a fact that the teaching at these institutions included few, if any, upper-level language courses, and few, if any, graduate level seminars. At such schools the Classics program hires because it teaches vast numbers of students in myth classes and because it services many sections of

¹ The classification list is available at <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/Classification/index.htm>. The labels "group A" and "group E" are the author's inventions, designed to facilitate reference. They are not used by the Carnegie Foundation and do not imply gradation by merit.

Latin for the language requirement or offers other courses in English that fulfill general education requirements. Those hired rarely see the few existing upper-division courses or Greek courses since there are so few of them. Many such schools have no graduate seminars to teach. What happens, then, if we look only at hires by schools that have graduate programs? It is here that we can best judge Oldfarthing's argument.

Of the 166 institutions hiring, only 48 have graduate programs listed in the 2001 *APA Guide to Graduate Programs*. That is 29%. And these 48 institutions hired 116 of the 334 total people hired during our time frame. That is 35%. To put it another way, 71% of the institutions hiring in our field do not have graduate programs and 65% of the jobs are in institutions that do not have graduate programs.

Or consider this. The liberal arts colleges, group E, made 112 hires during this period, or 34% of the total. These schools value quality teaching highly.

I could spin this out a while but the data tell a simple tale. Most of our Ph.D.'s, though trained in elite institutions, will spend a great deal of their careers not in graduate seminars but in front of a wide spectrum of classes ranging from Latin 1 to Epic in Translation and on to Senior Seminars in Vergil or Ovid. They will do this at institutions that take their teaching very seriously. To be sure, our Ph.D.'s have to publish and should publish. But our majors, minors, and, indeed, the health of entire programs are predicated to a large extent on the teaching skills of these teachers.

It is time, therefore, to address this issue head on. There was a time when Oldfarthing's views could prevail, but that day is long gone. Too many institutions are looking for someone who can coordinate their elementary Latin sequence. Too many Classics departments need dynamic teachers to insure their continued existence. And too many graduate students are being thrust into the classroom with little or no preparation for this important job.

For those who still need proof I turn to a recent survey National Association of Graduate-Professional Students.² On October 17, 2001, NAGPS released "The 2000 National Doctoral Program Survey." The results reported in their section on Classics Programs are enlightening. The 78 respondents included 65 current Ph.D. students, 6 who had received their Ph.D. since 1995, and 7 who classed themselves as former Ph.D. students who had not received the degree. These respondents gave an overall grade of C+ to the "Teaching and T.A. Preparation" they had received. Only 57% of the respondents gave a favorable response to questions in this area. This compared to an overall satisfaction grade of B-.

² The full report can be viewed at www.nagps.org or <http://survey.nagps.org/survey.php>. I thank Miriam Pittenger for first pointing this out to me.

When asked if they were “appropriately prepared and trained before entering the classroom,” only 41% gave positive responses and 54% disagreed or strongly disagreed. In response to the question “Teaching assistants in my program are appropriately supervised to help improve their teaching skills,” the overall grade was C and only 52% gave positive responses. Ironically, in response to the question “The teaching experience available through my program is adequate preparation for an academic/teaching career,” 81% gave positive responses and the letter grade was B+.

How to interpret that? It seems to me that the too-common approach, “throw them in and see if they can swim,” leads our Ph.D. students to a process of self-discovery about teaching. Lost at first, they eventually come to believe that they have figured it out on their own. But even if this is true, must we almost drown them to get to this point? And might we not end up with even better teachers if we actually taught them how to do the job? And, if I may be blunt, should we as educators be happy that untrained and unsupervised neophyte teachers think that they now have “adequate preparation for an academic/teaching career”?

Finally, we have seen from Robert Cape’s survey that most Ph.D.-granting institutions are comfortable with the way they prepare their T.A.’s as teachers. Yet most of the T.A.’s report that they are unhappy with the way they were prepared. As they say in legal circles, *res ipsa loquitur*.

BUILDING BRIDGES

I have set forth above two formal proposals: the formal training of our T.A.’s in a manner conducive to a department’s means and the establishment of a pedagogy minor in certain Ph.D. programs. The first will help the T.A.’s, our own enrollments, and the future of the field. The second will help certain of our candidates more readily land jobs. These are my major points, but I would like to end with some thoughts for further consideration.

First: we must all get on the same boat and begin to row in the same direction. There is a major need for forming alliances—for building bridges. For healing, if I may be so direct. I have sat in many boardrooms. And what I have heard has sometimes upset me for its sheer inaccuracy and obduracy. I have heard high-powered publishers insist that every high school teacher surely has Internet access. I have heard otherwise in-the-know Classicists insist that the APA only cares about publishing boring books, teaching graduate seminars, and creating Ph.D.’s. I have heard prominent high school Latin teachers and school district administrators say that Ph.D. candidates simply cannot teach Latin to high school students and that they will never consider hiring them. Something about the Ph.D. apparently knocks all the pedagogy out of

a person. This must come as news to Melissa Schons Bishop, one of this year's APA Pre-Collegiate Teaching Award winners. Dr. Bishop earned her B.A. in Latin from Wellesley College, her M.A. and Ph.D. in Classics from UCLA, and now teaches at Lenape Regional High School in Medford, New Jersey.

To be blunt, this sort of thinking has to stop. First and foremost it is obviously and factually wrong. I am impressed by how much time is spent at APA executive meetings discussing exactly the same sorts of things that are discussed at CAMWS and ACL meetings: scholarships for minorities, teaching awards for K–12 teachers, promotion of Latin and Greek, the need for teachers.

But the trouble is that this is largely unknown. A sea change has taken place in the APA, but it has been poorly advertised. Not only is the average member of CANE or CAMWS unaware of what is changing in the APA, but the average APA member is also unaware of how much has changed. That, then, is a priority. The APA must make its new priorities better known. The Newsletter and the new APA publication, *Amphora*, are fine vehicles for this. Likewise, the APA must continue to reach out aggressively and actively to regional and state classical organizations to form active alliances within which each unit can do what it does best.

On the other side of the coin, regional and state groups need to stop viewing the APA as a demonized “them.” The “them” that I hear some people complain about are the “them” from 20 years ago. By the same token, the APA needs to advertise itself better to such groups. We have begun this process with a revision of the annual luncheon at the APA where APA executives and officers meet with the presidents of the regional organizations and by regular APA presence at the annual meetings of regional organizations.

There is a desperate need to overcome the mutual biases and prejudices that exist between the “Ph.D. World” and the “Classroom World.” There should in fact be no division between those worlds and we should view each other as partners, not separate entities. And never, never as rivals. I look for a day when ACL panels are as routine at APA meetings as APA panels are at ACL Institutes.

In 1993 I participated in a Presidential Forum organized by Ludwig Koenen. Reporting on his Forum on the front page of the December 1993 APA Newsletter, President Koenen put it bluntly and well: “If classical studies are to survive as more than a petrified relict of the past and if Classics is to maintain its still accepted importance for the education of the next generations of citizens, the profession should rethink its obligation to secondary teaching and encourage more of its best students to turn to a career of high school teaching.”

Much, though not enough, has happened since 1993. I am confident that the time will come when more Ph.D. recipients go on to a fulfilling life in the pre-collegiate classroom. The time will come when school districts and administrators do not look at an advanced degree in Classics as a proof of inability to teach. The time will come, in short, when knowing what to teach is matched in importance by knowing how best to teach it and when all parties involved admit that we should be trained equally in what we teach and in how. And surely the possession of formal training in the art of teaching can only help this transition occur.

Quis docebit doctores? The answer is, of course, all of us. If the profession does not pay careful attention to how our future educators are taught to teach, we run a serious risk of becoming increasingly marginalized in the curricula of tomorrow, both those of the college campus and those of the middle and high school classroom. Let us begin—we have little to lose and much to gain.

WORKS CITED

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