

REACHING THE ANCIENT CITY
A PILOT PROJECT IN GREEK & ROMAN STUDIES

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Introduction and Background

Over the first weekend in April, faculty members in Greek and Roman studies (“classics”) from the ACS met for a conference at Rhodes College. Our primary objective was to foster ties among the members of our discipline in the region by sharing information about our curricula and focusing intensively on the organizational and pedagogical issues that are unique to the colleges and small classics programs in the ACS. For example, Latin programs in the secondary schools are far more robust in many of the states represented by our consortium than they are in other areas of the country. While there is great potential for our colleges to build on the training incoming students have received, we must work on developing strategies to facilitate the transition from high school to intermediate and advanced programs in college. We must also place a greater emphasis on coordinating efforts to sustain programs in the secondary schools and provide faculty-development opportunities for the teachers.

A second goal of our conference was to develop a series of collaborative initiatives that would support the needs of the individual programs by drawing on the collective resources of the consortium. Programs in Greek and Roman studies at the colleges in the consortium are all relatively small, ranging from a single person to a department of four. Each, however, must attend to at least three areas of involvement: the program must offer courses in at least one ancient language (and often in both Latin and Greek) for students at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels; it must also offer courses on the Greek and Roman societies both for majors in the program and non-majors; and, finally, the program often must participate in multi-disciplinary courses that form part of the required curriculum in the humanities for all students.

The conferees identified two specific areas where collaboration could measurably enhance the ability of individual programs to meet the demands in each of the three areas. The first concerns the majors in Greek and Roman studies. Faculty members agreed that majors would greatly benefit from working with a wider variety of faculty members. Majors in small programs can end up taking as many as ten courses from a single professor. Although such a mentorship can often work to the advantage of students, we concluded that students should have the opportunity to experience the views and perspectives of other scholars in the discipline, especially those who are preparing for graduate school in classics. We decided to work on three initiatives that would offer students, particularly majors, the opportunity to work with students and faculty members from other schools in the consortium:

1. We intend to develop and coordinate travel-study programs in the summer, so students can meet their peers and professors from other institutions in the consortium.
2. We are in the process of planning a intensive program of study during the summer specifically for advanced majors at a major research institution where students can combine the benefits of working in small groups with professors with the opportunity to gain experience working in research libraries and museums.
3. We are working to provide opportunities during the regular academic year for advanced majors, particularly seniors, to work with professors from more than one campus in a seminar or tutorial setting. Such a seminar is likely to take place on-line, using the Internet as the primary medium of scholarly discourse.

With regard to courses for non-majors, offered either as part of the Greek and Roman studies curriculum at a particular institution or as part of a required humanities curriculum, the conferees concluded that collaborating on a set of generic, easily-adaptable, computer-based teaching materials would not only help to solve the problems associated with selecting and ordering texts for students but would also represent a considerable savings in the amount of time required to prepare for each course. We decided that this archive of teaching materials should include three components:

1. A library of digital images, free of copyright restrictions, from which faculty members can draw for use in lectures and multimedia study materials.
2. A set of modular “handouts” on various aspects of the ancient world. These modules would exist in a number of formats, including simple text and html (hypertext mark-up language) versions, for use in different contexts. For example, faculty members at one college in an introductory course on the ancient world could download the text version of the module on the Athenian legal system for inclusion in a set of background materials that students are to read in conjunction with viewing a production of *Aeschylus’ Oresteia*. At another college, students of political theory might access the html version on a WWW server as part of their study of Athenian political and judicial institutions. Other modules may describe the conventions and rituals associated with marriage, the dramatic festivals in Athens, or the types and values of currencies.
3. An archive of syllabi, lecture notes, assignments, and examinations that faculty members could draw upon not only for use in their classes but also to inform themselves about approaches used at other campuses.

In formulating these initiatives, the conferees identified two problems. First, some felt that to participate in the on-line seminars and take advantage of the archive they needed to become more proficient in the use of available technologies. In general they have found it difficult during the course of the fall or spring semesters to find enough time to learn more about software they currently use, find out about other applications, or explore the resources on the internet. Their experience is not unlike that of most faculty members in all disciplines, but for faculty members in traditionally small programs, which seldom have more than three or four faculty members, the amount of discretionary time seems even smaller. The second barrier was funding. All believed that once in place, the organization and the archive could achieve self-sufficiency, but the effort needed to coordinate curricula and create the archive required a degree of financial support beyond the resources of any individual program or college.

Within this context, the faculty members in Greek and Roman studies propose to the Mellon foundation a project that will accomplish the immediate goals outlined above and ultimately lay the foundation for a more ambitious, long-term project to develop a regional “department” of Greek and Roman studies. The goal of this virtual department is to combine intellectual resources to provide all students at the colleges with world-class opportunities to study the ancient world in a wide variety of contexts and eventually to become fully integrated with programs in the middle and secondary schools as well as research programs at major universities in the region such as Vanderbilt, the University of Texas at Austin, Duke, the University of North Carolina, and Emory.

Plan for the Project

Workshops

The core element of the project are two workshops to be held at Rhodes College during the summers of 1996 and 1997. The approach of the workshop will draw on the design of the “Instructional Development Initiative” pioneered at Virginia Tech, which brings faculty members from a single discipline together for five days to provide basic instruction in the use of computers and then to acquaint them with software specifically suited to their discipline. The basic instruction includes an introduction to spreadsheets, word-processors, using the network for communication and to access information, and presentation software. We intend to offer a modified version of this program for at least one participant from each institution in the consortium over a six-day period. The following represents a preliminary schedule:

- Day 1: We will concentrate first on raising the general level of computing expertise by reviewing and experimenting with applications designed to provide means of communication and access to information over the network. These skills will ensure that the project team will be able to maintain contact with other users who can provide continuing support when they return home.

- Day 2: We will review resources applicable to courses in the humanities, particularly those of interest to faculty members in Greek and Roman studies. These will include *Perseus 2.0*, the TLG and PHI disks, the Database of Classical Bibliography, and a variety of other packages. This review will include a discussion of strategies for using and evaluating the materials.

Day 3: We will devote the third day to a discussion of the World Wide Web and HTML in preparation for the participants individually and in small groups to begin the actual process of incorporating electronic sources into their courses.

- Learning about existing products in the discipline. At present there are a number of databases available for use in courses that contain content from the ancient Greece and Rome, for example, the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae, the Packard Humanities Institute collections of Latin texts, papyri, and inscriptions, and Perseus. A number of software packages are also available including HyperMyth and Transparent Language, as well as several generic CAI packages and programs designed specifically for use with certain textbooks.
- Discussing strategies for incorporating technology into the curriculum. Learning about computer-based materials is only the first phase in the process of integrating them into courses. Faculty members want the chance to discuss ideas, formulate strategies, and actually begin experimenting as a group with specific approaches.
- Collaboratively building courseware. Few faculty members have the confidence to design and build courseware independently, but most have ideas about what the courseware should enable the students to do, either based on their own experiences as users of computer technology or pedagogical objectives. If they could work as a group, taking advantage of each person's individual talents and expertise, they were convinced that they could more efficiently design and produce courseware of a uniformly higher quality.
- Learning to make resources available over the internet. Each member expressed interest in learning more about applications that make information available over the internet. For example, they all want to design homepages for their local WWW server but felt that working as a group would be more efficient than experimenting individually.

They also identified three specific area of potential collaboration.

- A library of images without copyright protection. Although images are available from a variety of sources including *Perseus*, slide libraries, and network sites, the members of the group want to pool their own personal slide collections and build a library of digital images for use by anyone without concern for rights.
- A library of modular units for use in language and civilization courses on aspects of ancient culture. For example, a short module on the Athenian legal system could be of use in a number of contexts ranging from language courses to lectures on the daily life of ancient Athenians. Designing the modules as a team would make them more responsive to the needs of the individual faculty members, distribute the labor, and provide a natural context for review and evaluation.
- Electronic seminar for advanced students. As the technology evolves, a number expressed interest in developing a seminar for advanced students that would take advantage of digital audio and video as well as network based sources of information and e-mail. Such a seminar would require a considerable amount of technical coordination.

Finally, they discussed some of the barriers and problems involved in actually realizing some of their ideas.

- Planning and organization. Given the pressures on faculty members in small programs during the school year, participants felt that it would be virtually impossible for anyone to assume the responsibilities of planning and organizing a summer seminar without significant administrative support.
- Questions and problems concerning hardware. Many expressed hesitation with regard to implementing the ideas on their individual campuses because they were unsure about the required equipment and issues of compatibility. Some felt isolated because of specific equipment needs that were not supported at their institutions.

- Collecting and disseminating information. Some participants in the discussion were confident that they could contribute information about certain types of hardware or software, but no one felt that they could spare the time to collect information, forward requests to the appropriate experts, and disseminate answers to frequently asked questions.

An informational technician working with this group of faculty members could help facilitate all of the objectives outlined above and provide the necessary on-going support. The technician would be in the position to organize a summer seminar as well as collect current information about hardware and software with some guidance from members of the faculty. They could also collect information about the computing facilities at each campus and answer questions regarding equipment, help with requests for acquiring hardware and software, and act as an intermediary, if necessary, between the faculty members and their academic computing centers. Finally, they could help maintain a central archive of material or help individual faculty members make their individual course materials available over the network to others.

Finally, as the nature of education changes and grows in response to the proliferation of digital information, each discipline may well benefit from a program that would provide training in the use of computer-based information for graduate students or post-graduates who can begin their academic careers by serving in a multi-year position as informational technician. They would not only gain valuable experience in the use of technology, they would also have the chance to work closely with a group of faculty members both as a consultant and observer. The faculty members also would benefit not only by having the administrative and technical support but also by having the chance to work with a student who is just finishing or who has recently finished a significant research project in the field.