

Humanities-Classics, Ohio Wesleyan University Website

A Brief History (1942-Present)

of the Ohio Wesleyan University Humanities Program, Humanities-Classics Curriculum, and the HMCL Department

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One “discriminator” that makes Ohio Wesleyan’s liberal arts’ curriculum different and special is a department unlike any other at the University, the Humanities-Classics Department.¹ The Humanities study what people think and do, when and where, how and why they feel and act as they do. For seventy of the one hundred seventy years of Ohio Wesleyan’s history, this cross-cultural, inter-disciplinary, ancient to contemporary set of courses have examined humanity’s supreme and more quotidian creations. From ancient Athens and Jerusalem through the Middle Ages and Renaissance, to early modern and current Tokyo, Timbuktu, and the Baltic, men and women’s ideas, literature, music, and visual arts have challenged, excited, broadened and nurtured our students. A Liberal Education shapes character, instills cultural and moral values, prepares the mind for a variety of challenges, and hence shapes character. We proudly take part in that process, the calling of a citizen, a “vocational” training in both senses of that somewhat demeaned term. See below.

The small “h” humanities is one of four divisions of the academic departments at Ohio Wesleyan and now (2013) comprises Modern Foreign Languages, Philosophy, Religious Studies, English, and the big “H,” the Humanities-Classics Department. The last of these departments is the newest constituted as a department, but the Classics component of it is as old as the oldest, dating back to the opening of the college.² The two faculty members with perhaps greatest longevity are part of our department’s history: William Williams who was teaching on Day One in 1844 and taught for 57 years, and Ruth Davies who taught here for 58 years (1929-1987). These two pillars of the University created foundations for the liberal education available at Ohio Wesleyan. One instituted the study of Greek and Latin, the traditional Classics in the 1840s, and the other the study of the Western “Great Books,” the “Classics” (including Greek and Latin texts in translation) for a wider, more distracted and distracting world in the 1940s.

In the 1980s, the Department broadened the cultural horizons in which enduring texts are found, beyond the Western World of European and American literature, and hired specialists in Slavic, Asian, and African literatures, as well as in the world of Islam. This interest in great minds, great ideas, and great books led to the formation of our foundational courses (most of them now found in the 200-level offerings), then to a department with a program, a temporal sequence of courses, and a liberal arts mission and major.

¹ Very few comparable departments can be found elsewhere, although San Diego State University and Brigham Young University come to mind. Some liberal arts schools support a comparable program in “core” texts or “Great Books” or something else with various titles, e.g., St. Olaf’s College, (Connecticut) Wesleyan University’s “College of Letters,” Gutenberg College, Whitman College, Princeton University, Boston University.

² See W. C. Hubbart’s *Ohio Wesleyan’s One Hundred Years* [1943], pp. 17, 20, 28, and Barbara M. Tull’s *Ohio Wesleyan history, 150 Years of Excellence* [1991] 19.

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“Humanities” first appears in the *Ohio Wesleyan catalogue* as a separate category of instruction under course listings in catalogue XLI, no. 3 (March 1942).³ This development grew out of Ruth Davies’ post-graduate experiences at the University of Chicago. There she had continued her study of literature after receiving her BA degree as OWU valedictorian at the age of 19. The entry reads:

Humanities 201, 202. Three hours. Readings of Masterpieces (in translation) of Biblical and European Literatures. Offered each semester. Required of all students majoring in the Division of Language and Literature. (92)

There were two faculty listed, Theodore (Chad) Dunham, a Professor of German, and Ruth Davies, Assistant Professor of English. By the March 1945 catalogue, the entry had changed to include four staff members, reflecting the popularity of this “core” course in Western Thought. Two were members of the English Department, one of German, and one specified as belonging to “Language and Literature.” The course description had changed to a two-semester sequence:

Readings of masterpieces (in translation) of European Literature. First semester: from Homer to St. Augustine. Second semester: from Dante to Dostoyevksy. (XLIV. no. 3. 107)

By the May 1946 catalogue, two courses from other departments were listed under “Humanities”: “English 382, Russian Literature in English Translation,” and “Classics 221, Classical Mythology.” These were taught by Prof. Davies and Prof. Roland Boecklin, housed in German, but trained in Classics at Yale. The May 1947 catalogue adds a fifth instructor to the staff, Robert Ross, the first faculty member to be identified as a faculty member “in English and Humanities.” The entry also adds English 112 or 113 as a prerequisite as well as a fee of \$2.00 for the course. The English courses are freshman composition courses. In May 1948 the fee is identified as “Book rental,” a sixth staff member is listed as teaching in the program and another course is listed, “German Literature 361 and 362, German Literature in English Translation.” The prerequisite for Dunham’s German course is Humanities 202. The Humanities major used to demand courses in at least one foreign language, and, of course, our Classics major still demands advanced course work in Greek, Latin, or both languages.

Throughout the late ’forties, faculty were gradually added to the list of teachers in Humanities. The famous “Great Books” courses at Columbia University and the University of Chicago were widely imitated and adapted, here as well as elsewhere. The May 1950 catalogue identifies **the** Humanities course as “301-302, Great Books.” All Juniors had to enroll in it and discuss influential concepts and systems of ideas in fields often far from their specialties, regardless of their major and at a time when they had some experience of specialized college study. By 1951 one finds eight staff members in the Humanities department, a development owed to Davies’ great energies. The Great Books had by then gained a national following,

³ I gratefully acknowledge the careful research of Professor Joseph Musser (English Department review document of 1995). He compiled chronological information on the pre-history and history of Humanities-Classics through the 1964 OWU Catalogue. Professors James Biehl, Stephanie Merkel, and Anne Sokolsky offered helpful suggestions on earlier drafts.

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among returning veterans from World War II, in Adult Education courses, and in liberal arts curricula that had freed themselves from the German educational system's early specialization—an inclination that always bedevils liberal arts colleges.

The 1954 catalogue lists 13 HM faculty members. The program includes three Humanities courses: “257, Music and Art Appreciation”; “301-302, Great Books”; and “382, Russian Literature in English Translation” (no longer listed as an English course). It also includes “Greek 251 Classical Mythology” and “German 361 and 362 German Literature.” Three additional courses are listed in the April 1955 catalogue: “Greek Thought and Literature” (Greek 351), “Roman Thought and Literature” (Latin 351), and “Spanish Literature” (Spanish 371). In 1956 another two Humanities courses appear, 401-402, “Great Books of the Renaissance, Great Books of the Nineteenth Century.” In the 1959 catalogue the cross-listed courses disappear, and four Humanities courses or course sequences are described: “Great Books” (301-302), “The Commonwealth of Art” (357), “Great Books of Renaissance, Great Books of Nineteenth Century” (401, 402), and “Russian Literature in English Translation” (482).

The courses Humanities 201-202 were listed as a **required pair for all students** in the March 1945 catalogue. The General Humanities course, renumbered 301-302, was required of all students through 1962-63. The faculty and thus the catalogue dropped the required Humanities courses in 1963-64 and established “cafeteria-style” Distribution Requirements, with six divisions from which students must select existing courses: 1) Literature (including English); 2) Social Sciences; 3) Culture and Art; 4) Science; 5) Humanities, Religion, and Philosophy; 6) Physical Education. Later these divisions were realigned (or eliminated) to yield the current four: Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences (and Mathematics), the Arts.

For a period of nearly twenty years, then, all students enrolled for the BA degree at OWU were required to take the Humanities sequence in their Junior year, a remarkable and successful experiment, as many *alumni/ae* still testify. Along with the required courses, students heard visiting artists, poets, musicians, other authors, and academic lectures (in a series also organized (and partially funded) by our founder, Ruth Davies). Most of the faculty members were recruited from English, but other professors came from other humanities division departments, e.g., Religion (Phillips), Philosophy (Murchland), and Modern Foreign Languages (Dunham, Kent). Not all who essayed to teach in the program found it to fit their skills or interests, but many who did won OWU's highest teaching awards.

The Humanities *major* is listed for the first time in the 1961 OWU catalogue. The major testifies to the popularity of the formerly required sequence and the desire of some students to pursue the world of ideas without being limited by a particular language or period. The major is identified as “Interdepartmental” and requires 6 hours of literature in a foreign language (two or three courses), two philosophy courses, a seminar in another humanities department, an individual senior project, and an additional 28 hours from five of the following areas: history, philosophy and religion, art or music history, English literature, American literature, humanities, and a list of courses devoted to major literary figures (Chaucer, Milton, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Goethe). The listed faculty members continued to be recruited from Religion, Philosophy, Music, Language and Literature, and English. Some are listed as joint appointments, serving both “English and Humanities.”

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“Humanities” appears as a *department* for the first time in the 1963-64 catalogue. There are eleven faculty members, many of whom are listed as both “English and Humanities” staff. The Great Books series is expanded to include the Classical age (Greece and Rome), the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the Neoclassic and Romantic periods, the Nineteenth Century, the Twentieth Century, and Russia. In addition there are three new lower-level courses: “The Devil, Hero, and God” (20), “Man: The Public and Private Realm” (21), and “Religion and Literature: The Tragic Vision” (22). Students were no longer required to take the Great Books course sequence. The faculty teaching each course with multiple sections continued to gather regularly to discuss the common texts of a given week. Each instructor in a semester was allowed the liberty of dropping and adding one common text in the syllabus.

The department finds first mention as “**Humanities-Classics**” in the 1974-75 catalogue. At Professor Ruth Davies’ insistence and with the faculty’s agreement, a first-rank liberal arts college needs to incorporate courses in the Greek and Latin languages and hire professionals trained in those two ancient tongues. At Ohio Wesleyan, other departments with more than a single major have in their name an “and,” some incorporate a slash mark, and still others a hyphen. Our hyphen indicates the interconnectedness of the subsequent cultures that have built and build on Western Classical foundations and heritage, without intending to exclude other long and brilliant cultural traditions (like the Chinese).

For the first time since Prof. Dwight Robinson died, in 1941, a full-time Classicist was once more recruited in 1972.⁴ Greg Elftmann, a Hellenist, was hired to continue and revive the college’s oldest and original area of study and to serve as a resource for the non-Classacists in Humanities who were often teaching Greek and Latin texts in English translation. He was the first tenure-track member in the now joint Humanities-Classics Department who did not have a joint appointment in one of the other cooperating humanities’ department such as English, Philosophy, or Religion.

In the nineteen eighties, the department also comprised Professors Sam Pratt, Richard Bauerle, David Osborne, Lyman Leathers III, Bill Judd, and James Biehl from English, and Conrad Kent, Bernard Murchland, and Morgan Phillips from other “small h” humanities departments: Modern Foreign Languages, Philosophy, and Religious Studies. Donald Lateiner was hired in 1979 to take Elftmann’s place, to teach Greek and Latin courses and tutorials as well as expand the curriculum in Humanities-Classics. Many, if not most, HMCL faculty members have also participated in the Ancient, Medieval, and Renaissance Studies major and Lateiner headed the relevant Ancient sub-sections. Faculty members have also crossed departmental borders to participate in the Women (and Gender) Studies program (Lateiner,

⁴ In between the OWU careers of Robinson and Elftmann, there was a succession of shorter appointments. Roland Boecklin, nephew of the Swiss artist Arnold Boecklin, trained as a Classicist at Yale and hired as Professor of Classics and German, taught both Greek and Latin courses and tutorials (1948-1971). One of Boecklin’s OWU students, William McCulloh, the author of a study of Longus’ *Daphnis and Chloe*, was OWU’s last Rhodes Scholar (to date) and a Professor of Classics at our GLCA sister school, Kenyon College. For a full list and description of OWU’s Classics professors from the founding, with photographs, see Lateiner’s sister history at the HMCL Website (under “Welcome”):

<http://humanities.owu.edu/pdfs/20070210-TheClassicistsOfOhioWesleyanUniversity.pdf>

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Aneja, and Laurie Churchill was once chair of Women's Studies), and in East Asian Studies (Anne Sokolsky), and they have taught courses in the University's National Colloquium.

Biehl, after Judd, chaired the HMCL department for many years. He also developed a course on Paris and Florence (with the History Department's Prof. Hallenbeck) and ran a summer institute on "Ancient, Medieval, and Modern Drama" for the NEH. Lateiner, who also served several times as chair of HMCL (and AMRS) taught students ancient history and archaeology in Florence and Rome (1984) and led academic travel tours to Greece and Turkey (1988 and 2000). He developed HMCL's "Love and Sexuality in Literature and the Arts," and initiated courses in Women in Antiquity, the Ancient Novel, and Classical Archaeology. He also taught elementary and advanced Ancient History courses for the History department. Merkel also served as chair during a generational shift, when the department hired three new faculty members in as many years. As of 2012, Sokolsky became chair of Humanities-Classics.

With Richard Bauerle's example, HMCL developed African and Asian components in our courses. His "Freedom and Constraint" and Kent's "Mystic Vision" (and a visiting Japanese Professor's courses) reconnected OWU to the Far East. The HMCL department expanded faculty's and students' cultural parameters beyond the more familiar Western world. The department decided to hire specialized faculty in previously unrepresented or less familiar fields, such as Slavic Literature, Third World Literatures, and Women's Literatures. In 1989, Anu Aneja, a comparatist with a specialty in Indian and French literatures, became the first faculty member hired to teach "third-world" literatures. Laurie Churchill, another Comparative Literature Ph.D., was hired that same year (after a university-wide competition among departments) as a joint appointment to head Women's Studies from an appointment in Humanities-Classics (with a specialty in Latin as well as Gender Studies). In 1994, the Slavacist Natasha Sankovitch was hired for Russian literature and for Great Books courses and the "Picaresque Novel," also known as "The Rogue's Progress". This Tolstoy scholar filled the void in Slavic and Nineteenth Century Studies left by the retirement of our founder, Professor Ruth Davies (a Ph.D. degree in English). After Sankovitch's departure for a career in law, Stephanie Merkel was hired in 1998 to maintain the Slavic component as well as to teach many of the Great Books courses. Her "Devil Hero and God" offerings (HMCL 255) combine the Classical and subsequent Western traditions in a way that fills classes year after year.

In this period of expansion a number of full-time, part-time colleagues ably assisted us. Stephanie Winder taught the full range of courses in Classics before leaving for a tenure-track position, and after her, Herman Pontes and Brad Cook (2000-2006) enlarged our Greek and Latin offerings. Negar Mottahadeh and Fred Cadora (Emeritus, OSU) in this period presented special opportunities such as courses as diverse as Iranian Cinema and Classical Arabic Literature. After a number of non-tenure-track Classicists served the department (before a second tenure-line in Classics was awarded), the Latinist Lee Fratantuono was hired in 2005 to complement the specialties of the Hellenist Lateiner. These two Classicists have taught Latin and Greek.

Anne Sokolsky since 2006 has taught courses examining non-Western canons with a specialty in the Far East. Her specialty is modern Japanese literature, but her Asian courses cover material from all of East Asia, including art and other non-literary materials. After living in Morocco, Sokolsky has taught a seminar on Arab and Asian Women writers. Aneja's and

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Sokolsky's courses have continued the University's and the Department's long and serious engagement with the peoples of Asia and Africa found already in the courses of Bauerle and Kent). Issues of both race and gender have motivated changes in the curriculum since 1985 (Lateiner, Aneja, Churchill, Sokolsky, Livingston, in particular). Biehl, who served the department from 1971 to 2006, was succeeded in the department's European Medieval-Renaissance position, first briefly by a Renaissance scholar, Alison Lovell, then since 2011 by a Medievalist, Sally Livingston. Long-term part-timers Richard Elias and John Stone-Mediatore have brought their own expertise in the Eighteenth Century, Vampires, Bollywood, Modernism, and European Postmodernism into the HMCL classrooms. Recently faculty members have taken students abroad to France and Italy (Fratantuono) and Japan (Sokolsky). Further such travel-study lies in the future now that OWU avidly funds such summer programs.

The most popular Humanities courses for many years in the '60s, '70s and '80s were the descendants of the (now) 200-level Great Books courses, often with three or more sections per term. More recently, the introductory 100-level "Myth, Legend, and Folklore," and since 1981, "Love and Sexuality in Literature and the Arts," have enjoyed some of the highest HMCL enrollments with multiple sections. All these courses began with common readings, and quite limited variation, but texts and curriculum have diverged more and more in the last two decades. "Myth, Legend and Folklore" sections have become in most cases entirely different courses, depending on instructors, with distinct focus on the Classical, Medieval/Renaissance, Non-Western traditions, and Slavic materials. Some sections are purely literary, some have retained a comparative dimension, stretching across cultures from the Ancient Near East to Native American and stretching across the disparate materials of folklore—music and art, textiles and medicinal folk remedies, proverbs and slang, etc.

The original Great Books courses, the current 200-level courses, have modified their reading lists and syllabuses slowly over the decades. They have expanded to include texts that were, and are, not part of recognized canons. New courses in the Humanities include two types. There are newer Great Books courses spanning many languages and epochs such as "Public and Private," "Gender and Identity," "Rites of Passage," "Freedom and Constraint," "The Tragic Vision," "The Comic Vision," and "The Rogue's Progress: the Picaresque Experience." For examples, consider "The Modern Temper," a course designed by Kent, that spans 1880 to 1950 on both sides of the Atlantic that features Central European innovations in literature, art, philosophy, and music. "The Discourse of the Humanities," Livingston's innovative Sophomore seminar, may become a Humanities Major requirement. The Humanities faculty have also introduced more specialized courses at the 300-level reflecting HMCL scholars' varied expertise such as Leathers' "Reason and Romanticism," Davies' "Great Books of Russia," and Merkel's "Great Books of the Nineteenth Century." Phillips introduced "Modern Jewish Literature," Aneja, "Postmodern World Literatures," and Kent, "The Mystic Experience." Aneja's Senior seminar, "Women of Color," was redesigned by Sokolsky and titled "Debunking the Myth of the 'Oriental' Woman." Sokolsky has also enlarged the curriculum with "Great Books of East Asia," "East Asian Film," and "Elegance and Brutality: Topics in Modern Japanese Literature." New courses have also expanded the Classics offerings of the Humanities curriculum, e.g., Lateiner's "Women in Antiquity," "Epic and Anti-Epic," and "The Ancient Novels," and Fratantuono's division into two parts (Republic and Empire) for "Roman Literature and Thought" and his recent and popular "Alexander the Great."

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The Humanities-Classics majors were revised in 2010 to clarify whether a student majored in Humanities or Classics. The Humanities major is designed for undergraduate students who want to study literatures of the world and the “Great Books” but who lack the linguistic expertise to read all these varied texts in their original languages. The Classics major has a rigorous language skill requirement in Greek, Latin, or both. The distinction prevents student confusion, but ambitious students are encouraged to take courses in both programs.

Thus, Humanities-Classics, as a program and department, has been part of the fabric of OWU liberal education and the academic curriculum for the last sixty years, the last forty of which saw the return of an active program and major in the ancient Classical languages. The Humanities program has served students as an elective and a requirement, then a minor and a major. Of course, Humanities offerings also provide serious instruction and popular electives for students working in unrelated fields as different as Economics and Chemistry, Education and International Relations. While now all our faculty members belong to the HMCL Department, some courses remain cross-listed with other departments.

Professors here in 2013, as in Academies around the world, are publishing more specialized articles and books. Our teaching and even our research, nevertheless, stretches students beyond their training in the past, their “comfort zone.” Members of HMCL proudly claim an adventurousness that still crosses the usual disciplinary, temporal, and ethnic frontiers—to student delight. The synergy of ancient and modern Classics, their literatures and visual arts (including cinema), their folk and “classical” musics, architectures, and vibrant popular traditions (local religious rituals and evanescent jokes as well as tattoos, clothing, and food) have become essential dimensions of the disciplines of the humanities.

Who am I? What are my values? What talents do I have to make the world better? Where do I belong in my society? These questions, merely implied or asked directly of twenty-first century men and women, fuel our departmental curriculum. The exploration of ideas and practices great--and sometimes not so great--continues to motivate our Humanities-Classics faculty and students. Student self-discovery and comparison of value systems, pursuing the open dialogue-method of Plato’s Socrates,⁵ are vital to foundational Western values and the liberal arts concepts inculcated at OWU.

The University Statement of Aims (*OWU Catalogue* 2012-13, pp. 3-4) emphasizes three objectives: to impart knowledge about our cultural past; to enhance methods of research and encourage critical thinking; and to examine (our and others’) values. For many students, Ohio Wesleyan’s HuManities-CLassics courses, training, and challenges have been the “best thing,” in Latin the *summum bonum*, of their college experience. Consideration and discussion of powerful ideas, thoughts, and forces are for them profoundly “vocational,” as they set about discovering their callings in life.

ΓΝΩΘΙ ΣΑΥΤΟΝ

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⁵ Or (later, in the fifteenth century) Petrus Paulus Vergerius, *De ingenuis moribus et liberalibus studiis*, or somewhat later still, e.g., in the Humanist-Classicist Martha Nussbaum’s *Cultivating Humanity*.