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A Future for Ancient History in the Undergraduate Curriculum? The Case of the University of North Carolina

The paper reflects upon the current circumstances and future prospects for teaching ancient history at the undergraduate level in a large 'flagship' public university. The situation discussed is by definition a particular one, but at the same time sufficiently representative of experience elsewhere in North America to merit attention and debate. The briefest outline is offered of the present intellectual and institutional environment within which ancient history is taught at the University of North Carolina. But the main focus is directed to the notable array of challenges looming, and to consideration of the most effective strategies to meet their anticipated impact. One colleague in our minimally staffed field is approaching retirement. What is the likelihood of being able to replace him? In what area(s) of expertise will it be most advantageous to seek a successor? What are the consequences for undergraduate instruction (almost all of it undertaken by fulltime faculty) if the application for a replacement is denied, or if its fulfillment is made subject to lengthy delay?

A bold new undergraduate curriculum has been approved for implementation from the 2006/7 Academic Year. It will inevitably call for some rethinking of established approaches. For example, it demands of students more extensive writing than has typically been prescribed in introductory surveys: how is this additional component to be integrated most beneficially? More broadly, will the new curriculum boost the field, or undercut it? Without question, enrolments in ancient history have traditionally benefited from the requirement to take two history survey courses, the period for at least one of which must predate 1600; but the new curriculum reduces the number of such courses from two to one. A requirement to take one pre-modern course will remain, although this need not be in history, and the dividing line is now advanced to 1750, thereby further enlarging the competition for students' attention. The paper argues, however, that even if ancient history's survey enrolments suffer (in common with those of other fields), the new curriculum offers exciting opportunities elsewhere, which the field is well poised to exploit. Many of the old obstacles to co-teaching courses are to be removed. A novel 'North Atlantic World' course designation-intended not least to create a bridge between two continents-invites the opportunity to collaborate in courses on imperialism or slavery, for instance, as well as many other themes in cultural, economic and social history. 'Global Issues' is another novel designation attractive to the field. Here there is a distinctive contribution to be introduced by the University of North Carolina's Ancient World Mapping Center: the Geography Dept. has already proposed two joint courses with it on 'Globalization in the Ancient World' and 'GIS and Ancient Landscape;' a role for the center in the new interdepartmental Archaeology minor is likewise being developed. More generally, the new curriculum does its utmost to encourage Study Abroad programs, another form of learning experience where ancient history can and should show initiative.

The paper concludes that, so long as institutional commitment to the study of antiquity remains strong (as it is to date in Chapel Hill), an ancient history field which continues to

cultivate fresh perspectives, methods and partners within its own area and beyond need have little to fear from well planned curriculum change. For undergraduates, the range of training and insight that the field can offer-from traditional to experimental-will be enhanced in the future rather than diminished.