

Bard Classics Podcast

0:00 Josh: Welcome everybody to the next edition of our podcast! I'm Josh Tyler, one of the Assistant Directors of Admission, and as always, I'm here with Director of Admission, Mackie Siebens.

0:10 Mackie: Hello everyone! As Josh said, I'm Mackie Siebens, Director of Admission, and we're going to talk about Classic Studies at Bard today. We're joined by two professors in the field and I'm going to hand it over to them to introduce themselves. Go for it.

0:22 James: Hi, I'm James Romm, the Director of the Classical Studies Program.

0:26 Lauren: And I'm Lauren Curtis, professor of Classical Studies.

0:31 Mackie: Great! So today, as we said, we're here to talk about Classical Studies and the opportunities in that field at Bard. And so, the first question that we have for you guys is as follows: Classical Studies is a rather expansive field. Can you discuss what disciplines make up the Classical Studies program and the various approaches students may take to their own studies?

0:53 James: Okay well, it should be said first of all that Classics at Bard means the study of the ancient world, principally the Greek and Roman worlds, but also Egypt, Persia, India, antiquity generally. And that means not only language and literature, but art, philosophy, science, history, which is my own field. We call it moderation in all things, because at Bard you have a moderation, and if you moderate into Classics, you can study all those aspects of the ancient world. It's a very diverse field.

1:41 Lauren: And for me that's the really cool thing about Classics as a field, it started up as a discipline about 200 years ago, as interdisciplinary by nature, because to understand the ancient world and all of its fragments, you kind of have to put together all of those disciplines. And so, you have to have a lot of strings to your bow in order to understand this kind of complex, fragmentary messy ancient past, and that's what I really enjoy about it too.

2:05 Mackie: Cool! So, really, there are lots of different ways, that are required, really, to explore it at its fullest, essentially.

2:11 Lauren: Exactly.

2:12 James: Yeah, and I should mention that languages, Greek and Latin and Sanskrit, are all available at Bard on a yearly basis. They are central to the field, but not essential to it. That is, we encourage students who are interested in the ancient world to learn one or more of those languages, but, it's possible to major in Classics without doing them, so it's not a sine qua non, to use a Latin phrase.

2:42 Josh: And since there are so many disciplines that are a part of Classics at Bard, how do the students go about that? Do a lot of the students do a variety of these disciplines? Do they focus maybe more on the art or the literature or the history?

2:56 Lauren: So, we have two broad approaches you can take as a Classical Studies major. One is to be more language focused, where you spend a lot of time with linguistics, with the history of language, with literature studied in the original and then we also have a track where you're encouraged but you don't have to take the languages, and you focus more on the history and the culture and the art, with those kinds of interests. And I should also add, that even if you are really interested in languages but you haven't had the opportunity to study them in high school, you can absolutely start at Bard. We have Latin and Greek and Sanskrit and Hebrew, all the way from the absolute beginner's level – a week on Monday I'm going to walk into Latin 101 and teach people the alphabet and how to say hello, so we're going to start right at the beginning with the first years next week. But if you do have Latin or perhaps even Greek in high school, you can start at any level, for our more advanced levels too.

3:53 Josh: Great. James, you mentioned moderation before. Can you speak to the students a little bit more about what moderation is, that process of really becoming a Classics major?

4:07 James: So, in the sophomore year, typically the second semester sophomore year, sometimes first semester junior year, students choose their majors. That is, they become a candidate to moderate into a major, and moderation means submitting a set of papers, a set of written work that indicates your interest in that field and some work that you've already done in it. And a conversation is held with a board of three professors, to assess the work, to determine that you're in the right place and that you can do the work that the senior project will require, and that this is a good fit in terms of your interests and aspirations. Students who moderate into Classics typically submit a 10-page paper that they've written for another class, or perhaps they've expanded a paper that they've already written, that shows the kind of work that they want to do in Classics.

5:11 Mackie: You mentioned that your focus is in history, Lauren can you speak a little bit about yours as well, what your focus has been to date, even though you obviously have a well-rounded understanding of the field, of course.

5:24 Lauren: Yeah, so I teach really broadly, but to complement James' interest in history, I'm more of a literature and poetry person, so my great love is the relationship between poetry and performance. So that takes me all the way from Greek tragedy, you know poetry that's actually performed on stage before a live audience, to Roman poetry. My first book was on how Roman poets think about the idea of live performance in a very different, kind of literary, library focused world a little bit more like ours.

5:54 Mackie: So, do you see students in class who are interested in theater, that are taking your classes too?

6:00 Lauren: I do, and that's one of the things I really enjoy about teaching Classics at Bard in particular, that especially in our more introductory level courses, for students who are not particularly Classics majors, we get a lot of students in theater, in dance. I teach a course on sex and gender in the ancient world, so I get a lot of students who are Sex and Gender concentrators, so having all those conversations in the classroom is a lot of fun for me as a researcher as well as a teacher.

6:28 Mackie: Are there opportunities to study abroad as you're doing these various things in the Classical Studies department?

6:34 Lauren: Yeah! One thing I was going to follow up on about Moderation, which Jamie was talking about, is that's also a really great opportunity to kind of help students decide, in a field like Classics, which is focused on a culture which in fact isn't our own, is based in the Mediterranean, how they're going to use study abroad opportunities, if they want to, to explore the field. At the moment, we advise students to go away for summer programs. Students have gone to Rome, they have dug up an ancient Italian city in Fregene, which is just outside of Rome. It's actually very cool because it's older than Rome, but it hasn't been known for a long time. They've been to Greece to do internships at the Center for Hellenic Studies. So that's work experience as well as study abroad experience. We're also in the process of developing more of a class-based study abroad component as well, which is something that's going to be new in the program the next couple of years. So that's something to watch out for.

(continued)

7:44 James: We have a fund specifically for Classics, that pays for students to learn languages in the summer, or refine the language that they already know. Several of our students have drawn on that fund to go to a Greek program in New York, or a Latin program in Berkeley on the west coast. There are programs all around the country, and Bard can fund those for qualified students.

8:14 Josh: That is exciting. So, talking about Moderation and study abroad, and all the things that people will be doing here, everything culminates in the Senior Project. Can you speak to some recent Senior Projects, and where students' work in the field leads to?

8:32 James: Certainly! So, a lot of our students are interested in the languages, they learn Greek and Latin, or even Sanskrit, and they want to either read a text in the original, and interpret it, or translate a text from Greek into English, or Latin into English, and comment along the way, or write an introduction to their translation, explaining their approach to the art of translation. The bulk of our projects fall into that category, but there are also art history projects, philosophy projects, history, so it's not necessarily work in the languages, but that does tend to be sort of our bread and butter.

9:22 Lauren: Could I give you an example of one Senior Project please...

9:26 Josh & Mackie: Yeah, absolutely!

9:26 Lauren: it wasn't one that I advised but it was one that I was on the – so just like with Moderation, we also have the Senior Project board, where three faculty members examine and help wrap up the project – so it was one that I was on the board of and particularly enjoyed. Which I think sort of really captures how a student uses the project to finish up their time at Bard, but also to move on. This was a student who was focused on ancient art history. She did a project, joint in Classics and Art History, on the representation of costume on Greek vases. So she was looking at vases that depicted the play by Aeschylus, well the trilogy in fact, the Oresteia, the one with Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, and the red carpet and all of this kind of wonderful blood-stained costume imagery. So, her Senior Project was a really detailed analysis of those vases, a really great art historical and classical work. She also was a costume designer herself, she worked on several productions at the Fisher Center. And now I believe she's gone into the field of costume design. So that's a way that Classics can lead to kind of really unexpected interdisciplinary connections.

10:41 Josh: There's so many things that it's made up of, it really is (representative of) life in that way, so it's great that students can explore that in various ways.

10:48 Mackie: And it's also a good example of just how personal and specific a Senior Project can be, and yet be very thoughtful, highly intellectual, and really very expansive, actually. But you're writing about something that seems very, very niche, and its drawing from so many things that you happen to be interested in, which is kind of interesting. And if you're to apply to Bard, there is a scholarship for students that are specifically interested in exploring Classics while they're here, so take a look for that on our Financial Aid website under the scholarships section as well. So, thanks for joining us!

11:22 James: It's a pleasure! Thank you for having us.

11:23 Mackie: For everyone listening, tune into our next podcast. And if you have any questions, please reach out to admission@bard.edu and if you have any questions from this podcast or others, we can connect you to experts in the field to answer your questions if necessary. Thanks for listening!

11:38 Josh: We look forward to next time. Thanks!