

17 March 2009

Colleagues:

The Department of History has been asked for its comments on the revised request that Classics 323 (Religion in the Greco-Roman World) be granted GEC Historical Studies status. After consultation with the Undergraduate Teaching Committee, the Department has the following comments:

- The Department would like to commend the Classics Department for proposing what looks like an excellent course on Greek religion, extremely well designed and well thought through.
- Despite the new syllabus preamble, however, with its stronger emphasis on exploring the religious implications of broader political and historical changes, Classics 323 still does not meet the objectives of the GEC in Historical Study. As the syllabus reveals, it is conceptualized entirely around religious categories. While every class may incidentally address issues of historical change, the course's organizational logic and its primary analytical mode are clearly sociological/anthropological, not historical. Its priority is clearly to offer a grand, synchronic panorama of Greek religious practices, not a diachronic, causal account of the transformation of these practices over time.

In the interest of clarifying our concerns, the Department of History, with the specific input of one of our historians of Greece, would like to be a bit more constructive and specify what a "true" Historical Study course on this topic might look like. Such a course would have a syllabus reorganized around the issue of historical transformation.

Currently, the course seems to be an extended, essentially synchronic survey of the "system" of Greek religious practice. A revised, more authentically "historical" course would have to cover the basic details of this "system" as "background" in just the first one or two classes. The main body of the course would then explore the evolution of this "system" against a larger politico-cultural canvas, focusing on major innovations/shifts, such as the emergence of communal Olympian cult practice in the early period, the increasingly "public" control of cults in late archaic/early classical eras, the steady "immigration" of non-Greek cults into classical Athens, the "migration" of Greek cults to Egypt and the Near East during the Hellenistic, the assimilation of the Roman pantheon to the Greek, and perhaps ultimately the evolution and dissemination of Christianity. Additionally, if the syllabus were to be revised along these lines, the assignments should include readings from first-rate political and social histories of ancient Greece, and not just contemporary Greek descriptions of religious practices.

The Department of History is certainly not interested in telling any colleague what should

be the content and structure of their course. But a course organized such as that outlined above would be a true "Historical Study" course; unfortunately, the Department of History does not feel that the syllabus proposed by the Classics Department for Classics 323 (Religion in the Greco-Roman World) meets the learning outcomes for Historical Study. For these reasons, the Department of History advises that Classics 323 not be granted GEC Historical Studies status.

Sincerely,



Peter Hahn  
Chair, Department of History



Jennifer Siegel  
Chair, Undergraduate Teaching committee