DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 113 976 FL 007 292

AUTHOR Wolverton, Robert E.
TITLE Classics and the Future.
PUB DATE 15 Nov 75
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Fall Meeting of the Classical Association of the Atlantic States (Atlantic City, N.J., November 15, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Classical Languages; Classical Literature; College Language Programs; Educational Objectives; *Educational Planning; Enrollment Trends; *Greek; Higher Education; *Language Programs; *Latin; Secondary Education

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to show the need for Classicists currently in the field to begin long-range planning for the field of Classics. Classicists have been unable or unwilling to plan solid actions, waiting instead to react, or respond, to educational trends and problems. While the entire junior and community colleges movement was growing, Classicists ignored it and were ignored by it; more doctoral-level programs were begun, yet no one really stated the need or market for such programs and their degree recipients. These and similar actions and inactions have brought Classics to a critical stage; at the same time, other liberal arts fields are beginning to confront the same sorts of problems. With these allied fields, however, Classicists have not sought common bonds or paths of action. Thus, internally and externally, the discipline of Classics has done little to learn about its own goals and mission and to convince academicians and the general public that Classics is worth retaining at the secondary and collegiate levels. A call to commitment by Classicists on behalf of the Classics is followed by suggested steps which might be taken to establish machinery for planning. (Author/CLK)

CLASSICS AND THE FUTURE*

by

Robert E. Wolverton, President
American Classical League

Between the time I received my Ph.D. in Classics, in 1954, and the year in which I decided to try my hand at administration, in 1967, I dutifully and enjoyably behaved as a Classicist, teaching, writing, giving talks, organizing groups, and, in general, working comfortably in my Classical channels. Since 1967, my horizons have expanded each year, and so have my knowledge and understanding of not only the Classics but all of higher education. An even more intimate understanding of the Classics has been afforded me since 1972, when I was elected president of the American Classical League. Since that date, too, many unsettling things have happened which make our past, present, and future efforts as educators even more questionable.

Most recently, of course, we learned two disturbing facts: (1) this year's senior scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Tests showed a decline of 10 points on the verbal test and 8 points on the mathematics test, the average scores of 434 and 472, respectively, being the lowest since the College Board began computing averages in the mid-1950's. (2) A study done by a research team at the University of Texas for the U. S. Office of Education found that 23 million adults are "functionally illiterate" and that another 34.7 million are "functionally incompetent."

While these two facts have been termed "surprising" or "shocking" by the media, we in education should have been neither surprised nor shocked; these facts simply confirm certain trends of which we should have been aware. Let me cite a

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*A talk presented at the Fall meeting of the Classical Association of the Atlantic States, November 15, 1975, Atlantic City, New Jersey.

few "for instances": the SAT scores have been in a state of steady, if unspectacular, decline for twelve consecutive years. In the field of English, we were told that, between 1967 and 1973, the proportion of colleges and universities with no composition requirement for graduation rose from 6% to 24%, based on a survey of 491 institutions. Also in English, we may note that several well-known publishers of college textbooks, following the suggestion of the Association of American Publishers, have agreed to rewrite their college texts at the 9th grade reading level, instead of the 12th grade level previously used. In the field of History, we are informed by the American Historical Association that undergraduate enrollments have dropped 12% in four years and the number of majors has dropped 6½%. At the secondary level, we are warned by the Organization of American Historians that the study of American history is "in crisis," with students being pre-occupied with "presentism," i.e., current events, social studies and ethnocentric subjects. In foreign languages, the most recent survey by the Modern Language Association, released just last week, shows a decline of over 6% in the 1972-74 period; the sharpest decreases occurred in German (14%), French (13%), and Russian (12%), while enrollments in Spanish and Italian dropped only slightly. On the other hand, the largest increases were in ancient Greek (18%), Latin (3%), and other, less-taught languages (8%). Lest we begin to feel too smug, however, the director of the study, Richard I Brod, said that the increases in Greek and Latin probably did not indicate that more students were studying the languages themselves, but that more and more departments of Classics were offering courses on ancient culture and literature in translation. The total biennial drop of 6% in the study of languages between 1972 and 1974 follows a 9% drop in the period between 1970 and 1972. Finally, in the field of languages, the MLA indicates that the proportion of institutions with no foreign language requirement -- either for

admission or for graduation -- has increased from 18% in 1970-71 to 39% in 1974-75; the proportion with graduation requirements fell from 77% in 1970-71 to 53% in 1974-75. What with these college requirements diminishing every year, we may well anticipate a sharp fall-off of modern language study in the secondary schools; the modern languages will then join Latin in the quest for survival in the midst of such problems as population shifts, job openings and placement, a more competitive situation as students have an ever-greater number of courses to choose from, and parents who see little advantage in their children's taking any foreign language.

While this list of "for instances" may be unknown to many Americans, it has not escaped the attention of some commentators. Let me share a few words from three such critics, who, by the way, are milder in tone than many others. (1) Charles Silberman in his book, Crisis in the Classroom, (1970), lamented, "What is mostly wrong with the public schools is due not to venality or indifference or stupidity, but to mindlessness. To be sure, teaching has its share of sadists and clods, of insecure and angry men and women who hate their students for their openness, their exuberence, their color, or their affluence. But by and large, teachers, principals, and superintendents are decent, intelligent, and caring people who try to do their best by their lights. If they make a botch of it, and an uncomfortably large number do, it is because it simply never occurs to more than a handful to ask why they are doing what they are doing -- to think seriously or deeply about the purposes or consequences of education. This mindlessness . . . is not a monopoly of the public school; it is diffused remarkably evenly throughout the entire educational system, and indeed the entire society.

(2) For a special report published jointly in 1974 by the Group for Human Development in Higher Education and by Change Magazine, George Bonham, the editor

of Change, observed in the "Foreword," "There is a curious thing about teaching: it is at once the most central business in the college world, and yet it is the least talked about. Grumbled about, yes. But one rarely hears an intelligent discussion of it. Most faculty, I suspect, would rather keep things that way. One attends various academic conferences, and people act as if teaching were not their prime occupation . . . . As a consequence, much of what passes for higher education tends to dull the enthusiasms of thousands of new learners rather than strike fresh sparks of intellectual inquiry and curiosity . . . . One wishes that exciting teaching were the rule rather than the exception." (Faculty Development in a Time of Retrenchment).

(3) James J. Kilpatrick, in his syndicated column of September 9, 1975, assessed the decline of the SAT scores and attacked: "It occurs to me that the primary blame for this colossal failure should be placed squarely upon the educational establishment. Our schools have been afflicted with teachers more interested in fads than in fundamentals . . . . The taxpayers have invested a fortune in their schools, and the investment has been frittered away . . . . The situation will not improve. Millions of school children are today being cheated out of a solid, substantive, basic education, but the pity is that they only dimly perceive what they are missing. As their own children grow up, and new teachers come along, standards will steadily diminish. Let us look at these test scores and weep for the 'culturally disadvantaged'; we are raising a whole nation of them."

You may well wonder, at this point, just what this recitation of "for instances" and criticisms has to do with you and me. What it has to do with us turns on a simple question, "What have we, as classicists, been doing in the midst of these events and trends?" Have we, as members of a national academic discipline, sat down to look at where we are, put before outselves a statement of mission,

established some achievable goals and objectives, and fulfilled some of the goals and objectives good not only for our discipline but for society-at-large? The answer is "No!" Well, then, have we as regional, state, or local organizations engaged in any of these activities and allowed other disciplines and citizens to know what we are, what we are doing, how we are doing it, and why we think our discipline is so important to the welfare of society? Again, the answer I fear, is "No." "What have we been doing, then?" you ask. My answer is, that, as a profession, we have done very little except to trust in the Lord and hope that all enemies, foreign and domestic, real and imagined, would eventually go away. We have contributed to the general "mindlessness" by not asking ourselves why we are doing what we're doing; we have had a few (if any) serious discussions about teaching, at least in the meetings I have attended for twenty-one years; and, we have been chasing our own butterflies while other disciplines have begun to encounter the problems familiar to us and while academic standards all about us have slipped noticeably.

To be sure, there have been some refreshing exceptions; outstanding programs have been set up by individuals, such as Rudy Masciantonio in Philadelphia and Judith Le Bovit in Washington, D.C., and research funds recently granted Ohio State University will provide for a system of individualized instruction in six languages, including Latin, and for the development of an audio-tutorial program in Greek and Roman Civilization. As well, two attempts have been made at the national level to see where we were/are and what we might do to better our profession. There was, first, the attempt to form a national umbrella under the banner of Classical Associations of the U. S. A., with one part-time executive secretary and one part-time secretary; that effort simply reminded us that the age of miracles is passed and that an entire profession cannot realistically expect

one part-time person to identify and solve all its problems.

The second attempt came with the establishment of the Committee on the State of Classical Studies by the American Philological Association in 1973. That committee, of which I have been privileged to be a member, has tried to select a few major problems confronting our discipline and to take some positive actions. But, the group is composed of full time working persons and is depending upon a $2,900 budget for 1975-76 to support its efforts. Even with these drawbacks, however, the committee has continued to be optimistic and determined. In all honesty, though, this committee, too, cannot be expected to perform miracles. As well, these actions, and others which have been taken, have come about as a reaction or response to a given situation, rather than being planned and in anticipation of certain trends; thus, we have not really seized the iniative but have been pushed, or drifted, into the creation of a response.

If one were to seek the last national impact by the discipline of Classics, he would have to go back to the famous Report of 1924. Since that time, the two national organizations of Classicists, the American Philological Association and the American Classical League, have sponsored many small and large studies and surveys, all of which are resting somewhere in web-covered offices. So, here we are 51 years later, with no visible clout or impact on the national educational scene and with no cohesion or direction within our own ranks, despite the fact that more graduate schools have turned out more and more Classicists over the past twenty years.

Within these internal and external contexts, what is the future of the Classics? Obviously, no one can say. What we can say, however, is that we will and must begin, as a profession, to engage in some long-range planning activities, agreeing upon a statement of mission, establishing some goals and objectives,

discovering the many assumptions within which we will have to operate, and setting our priority actions into motion. All this will take a great deal of work, beginning with the first thing which must be done, that is, obtaining a consensus among all Classicists for a mission statement. If we, among ourselves, cannot agree upon our identity and our intention, then we are, and should be, doomed to extinction.

Following this exercise, we must consider our total environment; again, let me illustrate with a few examples: we know that, in 1960, there were 4.5 million live births and that, in 1973, there were 3.1 million live births; we know that there was a 23% increase in the 14-17 age bracket between 1963 and 1973 and that there is a projected decrease of 17% of 14 to 17 year olds between 1973 and 1983; in the 18-21 age bracket, a 42% increase between 1963 and 1973 will be followed by a 1% increase between 1973 and 1983. Enrollment projections for the decade 1973-1983 show a 10% decrease in kindergarten through 12th grade, with a 14% decrease in grades 9 through 12. Finally, a 35% increase in the number of high school graduates between 1963-1973 will be followed by a 13% decrease between 1973 and 1983. At the higher education level, consider these statistics: a 90% increase in degree-credit work between 1963 and 1973 will be followed by a 5% increase between 1973 and 1983; the number of full time students will decrease 6% between 1973 and 1983, after an 85% increase between 1963 and 1973; the number of women students in higher education grew by 118% between 1963 and 1973, while men increased by 72%; in the period 1973 to 1983, it is projected that the number of women will increase 9%, of men 2%; in the non-degree-credit area, there was a 299% growth between 1963 and 1973, and there is an anticipated 51% further growth between 1973 and 1983.*

*These projections are based on Series E from the Bureau of the Census (for population) and on assumptions given in Appendix A of Projections of Educational Statistics to 1983-84 (for education).

Other environmental assumptions will have to be made about the changing ages within our population, the shifts and mixes of peoples, the rapidly growing interest in career education, the economic conditions, including the prices of going to college (public or private) and the costs to the institutions of educating the students, and the thus far ignored field of international education. As well, external factors over which we have no control must be recognized and assumed within our planning; in this category are such things as the Catholic Church's decision to move to the "vernacular" languages in its services and the subsequent decision by Catholic schools and colleges to drop Latin as a required course for entrance or for graduation; another example is the fact that many new competitors dot the educational horizon--nearly 12,000 proprietary (for profit) institutions, plus such firms as Boeing Aircraft, IBM, and Xerox.

All these factors, and others, I suggest, have serious implications for us and our field. But to my knowledge, no Classicist anywhere is even thinking about one of them. Worse, we have no machinery within our organizations to have someone or some group begin to gather the necessary data. Worst of all, however, we either have no will to engage in this sort of long-range planning, or we have total ignorance as to how we should proceed. APA, with its annually rotating presidents, seems not to have the capability of boldness needed to initiate and sustain such an endeavor, and ACL, with its limited funds, will never be able to afford such a venture.

What is needed most is a commitment on the part of all Classicists that a long-range planning and action program must be, and will be, established. If that commitment means money and personnel, we must be prepared to sacrifice and give more money in the way of dues and more time in the way of participating at whatever level we can. We need, in short, individually and collectively, to take

the famous dictum of Socrates one step further: we can say with him that "the unexamined life is not worth living," but we must also remind ourselves that "the uncommitted life is not worth living." Until we make such a commitment and begin to bestir ourselves, we shall be content to let nature and history take their course, and we shall watch the Classics go the way of Sanskrit and other so-called exotic languages.

We must, then, organize ourselves, putting in the necessary funds, personnel, and participation to chart our course; second, we must seek out as allies all those in the liberal arts who are experiencing some of the problems we've had for years; third, we must overcome our own "hang-ups" about colleagues in and out of the field of Classics and take on a more enthusiastic, aggressive stance, showing that our field has more relevance than any ordinary citizen or student dreamed of; finally, we must consider our discipline as another of our responsibilities and think in larger terms than "I" or "my school." We can look back on many sins of omission and commission: for example, where were we when the junior and community college boom began, a boom which now shows one of every two college freshmen attending such an institution? How did it happen that administrators and guidance counsellors became our enemies? Why did we permit so much bad teaching to do as much damage as it has done? Why were Classicists who were successful at making our field known to more people, men such as Moses Hadas, sneered at by the "purists"within our ranks? How are we going about the business of identifying and encouraging younger leaders within our profession? What proof is there that our field is better off because we have over 80 graduate departments producing more doctorates of questionable quality in an ever-shrinking job market? Have we "missed the boat" by not utilizing the services of a good public relations firm or a good fund-raiser, or both, for our discipline? When did we last

examine our high school curricula and decide to make any or no changes in the Caesar, Cicero, Vergil pattern? And finally, how many courses have we set up in departments of continuing education, where over 8% of the total adult population is engaged in some sort of further education?

An Old Testament prophet said much in a few words when he declared, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Substitute "Classicists" for "people," and we see a grim future, or no future at all. If there is a future for the Classics, it needs a vision now. I challenge you, as members of the Classical Association of the Atlantic States, to demand that vision and to put forth the kind of commitment which will lead to a consensus among all Classicists and a plan of agreed upon goals and actions. You may well discover within your midst the Classical "Moses" who will lead us to the "promised land," which bears the name of "the future." Thank you.