

# Embedding equality and diversity in the curriculum: a classics practitioner's guide



Susan Deacy



# Contents

<b>Section</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1. Introduction: equality, diversity and the classics practitioner</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Equality, diversity and ‘classics’</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Curriculum-wide approaches</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4. In – and beyond – the classroom</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>5. Assessing students</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>6. Case studies</b>	<b>8</b>
6.1 Non-traditional assessments and student-staff projects	8
6.2: Peer assisted learning in Classics and Ancient History	9
6.3 The Body, physical difference and disability in ancient Greece	10
6.4 Slavery in ancient Rome	12
<b>6. Conclusions</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>7. Bibliography</b>	<b>13</b>

# I. Introduction: equality, diversity and the classics practitioner

Equality and diversity (E&D) have long been of interest among classicists. It is now the responsibility of all practitioners to ensure that the student experience is suitably non-discriminatory and inclusive – across the curriculum, in and outside the classroom, and via assessment and feedback.

In the wake of UK legislation, it is everyone's responsibility to ensure against discrimination against age, disability, race, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, marital relationships and civil partnerships, pregnancy, maternity, and religion and belief. This guide is written principally to suggest how the following groups can ensure equality of opportunity and outcomes for all students and meet, or even exceed, requirements under the legislation:

- 1 Those with responsibility only for curriculum delivery with little to no input on module or programme design.
- 2 Those with responsibility for individual module design and assessment but with little to no input on programme design.
- 3 Those with responsibility for overall programme design, delivery and assessment.

Equality and diversity are terms with a range of possible meanings. This guide offers the following working definitions:

- *equality*: creating a fairer society in which all can participate;
- *diversity*: acknowledging differences in society and considering how these can contribute to a more inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to participate fully.

According to Clayton-Pedersen et al. (2009, as explained in Lee et al. 2012, p. 201), “diversity in a campus context entails ‘the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement’ (p. 6) with differences in a purposeful manner so as to increase one’s diversity-related competencies. The authors define differences as both ‘individual,’ such as personality, learning styles, and life experiences, and group or social, such as race/ethnicity, gender, country of origin and religion (p. 6). According to this definition, diversity refers not to the presence of difference in student demographics or course content, but to the act and process of engaging those differences in an intentional, purposeful manner”. (Clayton-Pedersen et al. 2009 as explained in Lee et al. 2012, p. 201)

The guide is informed by the following convictions:

- **E&D practice can benefit all students** not just those who might be disadvantaged as defined by the legislation;
- **the best diversity approaches are ones that focus on how different all students are.** An inclusive approach to learning and teaching in classics can challenge students in ways that help them to succeed as students and as graduates;
- **E&D is the responsibility of all practitioners** whatever their teaching or other duties. An approach informed by E&D can improve the practice of all involved in designing, delivering and reviewing programmes. Adopting inclusive practice can alleviate the risk that tutors might be barriers to successfully embedding E&D by bringing any unconscious prejudices to their practice;
- **no single size fits all:** the guide is seeking to make suggestions rather than prescribe how each classicist or each classical programme should enhance the inclusivity of the student experience. It is aiming to equip practitioners with a toolkit from which they can draw as required. Strategies for embedding E&D will vary depending on types of institution, specific staff expertise and student backgrounds, and the type of programme. The case studies at the end of this guide concern practice across a range of institutions in the UK and beyond;
- **vary the curriculum, vary the teaching, vary the assessment** to ensure diverse options and a diverse experience for all students.

The guide sets out some ways to enable the student experience to be suitably inclusive while also exploring challenges involved in creating this experience, including some of a disciplinary-specific nature. The guide also provides examples of how current practitioners are ensuring the experience of students is informed by

principles of E&D. These include the pedagogical work reported on in areas including disability, race and sexuality by contributors to the edited volume Rabinowitz and McHardy (2014), a key resource for classics practitioners striving to create an inclusive learning and teaching environment. The case studies in section six of the guide detail initiatives in four institutions towards diversifying the curriculum, teaching methods and assessment.

## 2. Equality, diversity and ‘classics’

What a classics programme constitutes cannot be pinned to a straightforward definition. This guide uses classics as a term of convenience. The curriculum for a Classical Civilisation or Classical Studies programme will differ from a Classics degree or an Ancient History programme, or – for instance – a degree in Classical Archaeology. Practitioners might be teaching across several programmes, and at both Bachelor’s and Master’s level, and might be involved in designing and/or delivering a curriculum for students whose core learning experience may involve other disciplines – especially in the case of combined honours or joint honours students. Such is the inter-disciplinary nature of classics that modules might be open to students from other disciplines including Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies, History, English Literature, History of Art, and Archaeology. Case study 3 details how a module on ancient disability was opened to students on a Disability Studies programme. Practitioners might benefit from studying the benchmarking documents for relevant subjects and from the HEA toolkits where available.

*"Classics is the study of the languages, culture, history and thought of the civilisations of ancient Greece and Rome. It is one of the most varied and interdisciplinary of all subjects."* (University of Oxford Classics Faculty website <http://www.classics.ox.ac.uk/why-classics.html>, last accessed 31.03.2015)

The view of the group updating the benchmarking statement for classics and ancient history in 2014, of “a subject that has horizon, not frontiers” (QAA 2014, p. 4) is more apt than ever with the growth of classical reception studies which is extending the reach of the discipline. Classics is a discipline full of potential for promoting inclusivity and appealing to a diverse body of students via a curriculum consisting of such areas as ancient culture, language, gender, sexuality, social history, military history, mythology, political history, religion, art, literature and epigraphy. The study of classical reception can enable students to explore such issues as the impact of ancient cultures on post-classical identities and on the appropriation of classical themes and topics by a range of groups. As the revised benchmarking statement notes: “Because of the breadth of its historical significance and its reception, the subject area has a particularly attractive and important contribution to make in a multicultural society.” (QAA 2014, p. 9)

*“Promoting equality involves treating everyone with equal dignity and worth, while also raising aspirations and supporting achievement for people with diverse requirements, entitlements and backgrounds. An inclusive environment for learning anticipates the varied requirements of learners, and aims to ensure that all students have equal access to educational opportunities. Higher education providers, staff and students all have a role in, and responsibility for, promoting equality.”* (Revised Subject Benchmark Statement for Classics 2014, p. 3)

Thanks to various outreach initiatives, future students may come from a broader range of backgrounds. For example, through the South West Wales Literacy Through Latin Project, students at Swansea University are teaching classical languages as volunteers to pupils in local schools (case study 1). Practitioners more than ever might want to consider how to create a learning experience that is relevant to a broader and more diverse body of students.

*“A subject that was designed for rich, white, men.”* (First-year Classical Civilisation student response to survey on perceptions of classics at the University of Roehampton in 2013)

However, classics is sometimes perceived as an elitist subject (see e.g. Cartledge 1998, Foster 2014). The result is a set of particular challenges for embedding E&D. Indeed, some prospective and current students view classics as a subject that excludes particular groups. In a survey of undergraduate Classical Civilisation students' assumptions, expectations and understanding of inclusivity in 2013 at the University of Roehampton, one of the respondents described classics as "a subject that was designed for rich, white, men... the discipline has quite a lot of history behind it, that many people dislike". Relatively few students from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds apply to study classical subjects. According to one of the student respondents to the survey at Roehampton, this could be "because the cultural links with the ancient world would not be felt". Conversely, as discussed in case study 4, some students are drawn to the study of classics because they perceive it as a safe topic removed from social and cultural issues.

This guide gives a flavour of some of the moves that practitioners have made to diversify the curriculum, make it relevant to a range of students, challenge students to think differently about classical culture, and encourage students to question their cultural and personal assumptions. In some cases, it has been practitioners outside the UK who have pioneered moves towards creating a curriculum geared towards the study of such topics as disability, race, class and multiculturalism. Case study 3 describes moves to broaden the curriculum at the University of Toronto to include a consideration of issues around disabled bodies and open up new perspectives on the study of the ancient world. Case study 4 details strategies to challenge student assumptions at Hamilton College in New York through the teaching of Roman slavery.

Many practitioners are developing ways to show students that the same cultures hailed as the birthplace of western values were diverse, multicultural and 'other'. For example, the contributions to Rabinowitz and McHardy (2014) by Suzanne Sharland and Polyxeni Strolonga describe experiences teaching students from a conservative Christian background in respectively, South Africa and the US. Other contributors to the same volume discuss their initiatives towards creating a more diverse learning experience through their teaching of subjects including disability, slavery, and race and ethnicity.

Several studies dealing with supporting disabled classics students (incl. Shahabudin and Turner 2009) have revealed issues that need addressing. The study of classical languages are assumed to pose particular challenges to dyslexic students and to others who learn differently in terms of how course content is communicated and competences are assessed. Dyslexia Scotland's [Guide to Classics](#) (Thomason 2013) identifies the assumed barriers and sets out actions that teachers can make to improve their practice. However, as Ray Laurence "dyslexic and also a classicist" (2010, p. 6) notes, we should challenge the perception of a dyslexic way of perceiving the world as one beset with problems. In place of the 'deficit model' of dyslexia, he advocates a focus on the abilities characteristic of dyslexic people not least in visual and holistic thinking.

### 3. Curriculum-wide approaches

Under the [Equality Act 2010](#), universities are expected to adapt to the requirements of students rather than expecting students to adapt to them. Inclusive practice should not only be concerned with being responsive to particular requirements: it should also anticipate these requirements in the first place though ensuring appropriate support is in place, through suitable learning and teaching methods and by devising a curriculum that is relevant to a broad range of interests and that can engage students from a range of backgrounds and learning requirements. Practitioners should ensure that support information and advice is in a place where it is readily accessible to all students, and there should be procedures at programme level and elsewhere for reviewing the curriculum.

An HEA workshop on issues of equality and diversity in classics in May 2013, which drew together academics, trainee teachers and disability tutors from several institutions, found that there is a need for much greater

support for classics academics in devising a more inclusive curriculum that will enhance the learning experience and attainment of disabled students and BME students, and also of all students. Institutions and departments, therefore, should consider what mechanisms and development practices they could put in place to develop environments that embed E&D. Case study 1 notes the institutional changes that were needed to implement changes and enable future developments in E&D at Swansea University.

A key means to ensure an inclusive teaching and learning experience is by taking a curriculum-wide approach that anticipates and manages the varied requirements of students and that ensures a suitable range of classroom strategies and assessment methods. While writing this guide several institutions were exploring how to embed E&D in classics and in cognate subjects. For example, at the University of Oxford, an initiative was underway across the humanities on E&D in the curriculum, including how to incorporate a range of ancient perspectives on such issues as ethnicity, together with more reflection on ancient discourses about ethnicity, and more modern discourses about ancient material. Case study 1 details curriculum-wide initiatives to create an inclusive and diverse experience for students studying classical subjects.

Practitioners need to make sure that E&D is not offered as an 'add on' to the curriculum or as a box-ticking exercise. It is not enough that there be specific modules on topics such as disability, status and gender, valuable though they are. Indeed, designated modules such as those described in case studies 3 and 4 enable in-depth study of particular topics which have huge value for transforming students' engagement with the ancient world and with their own cultural and personal values.

Meanwhile, by being incorporated into other modules, E&D can become part of the course content for a wide number of students, and possibly all students, rather than a potentially self-selecting group. A strategy for practitioners might be to give thought to how best to organise the content of compulsory modules to enable all students to appreciate the diversity of the ancient world, to become diversity competent and to experience a range of teaching and learning methods. With this, we can begin to work towards fostering good relations as well as minimising discrimination and advancing equality.

## 4. In – and beyond – the classroom

In all modules – not just ones with obvious E&D content – tutors can introduce varied learning and teaching activities that diversify the learning experience. These might include:

- using a range of types of sources to ensure students understand the benefits of, and possibilities in, different types of evidence. For example, a beginners' language course at University College London includes a session in the Petrie Museum where, by looking at objects, students are offered fresh ways to think about what texts mean: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/classics/students/undergraduate/petriemuseum> [last accessed 31.03.2015];
- incorporating activities with reference to particular contexts, for example constructing positions from particular angles such as a woman, a metic or a slave. Case study 4 details how students were able to engage with potentially troubling subjects in a module on ancient comedy by performing scenes dealing with issues including slavery and rape;
- drawing on approaches to ancient sources informed by e.g., BME and feminist issues to relate the study of classical topics to contemporary debates about gender, sexuality, feminism, and cultural diversity. Case study 3 details how the 'prism' of disability offered new ways to deepen student engagement with ancient evidence;
- engaging students outside the classroom. Case study 2 discusses the development of a peer-assisted learning programme at the University of Bristol to enhance the experience of students from non-traditional backgrounds. Social media, such as wikis, can offer shared and potentially safe space to support students outside the classroom, while promoting personal engagement and adding depth to class discussion. Case study 1 discusses the use of Facebook as a tool for supporting student learning. Margaret Butler reflects on her use of wikis to complement and enrich classroom learning in Rabinowitz and

McHardy (2014, p. 48-9). In her contribution to Rabinowitz and McHardy (2014), Polyxeni Strolonga discusses her strategy of asking students to reflect, in an anonymous piece of writing, on how to read Plato's *Symposium* as modern people and to state whether this made them feel uncomfortable. As she details, this enabled students to share views they might be unwilling to air in class or in assessed work. The views were summarised in class by the tutor to show the variety of ways to read a text.

One challenge for the practitioner involves creating a supportive classroom space that is non-oppressive and non-discriminatory. Case study 3 considers the impact of the creation of an 'inclusive and comfortable learning environment' on the learning of a disabled student. Another, potentially divergent, challenge concerns how to devise learning methods that challenge the assumptions that students might be bringing to their studies and that even sets out to make students feel uncomfortable. Such approaches can stimulate the desirable attribute in a classics graduate of "openness to change" (QAA 2014, p. 13) but they can prove potentially troubling for students. Several of the contributors to Rabinowitz and McHardy (2014) discuss their strategies for teaching topics that might provoke difficult and even traumatic responses (incl. Lewis; Endres), and there is also a focus on the challenges posed by particular practitioners – such as men teaching rape (Thakur). Kurt Lampur has reflected on when to introduce potentially sensitive material by evaluating his experiences teaching sexually-explicit material in a language class (Lampur 2012).

Some practitioners use techniques designed to shock students into thinking differently about what certain ancient evidence means. Indeed, as noted in case study 4, it is the duty of classics tutors to make students feel uncomfortable about material they might assume to be removed from modern cultural debates. Deacy and McHardy (2012) details how one classicist has used modern comparative material to break down the distances between students and the ancient material. In a session on ancient warfare where students would not be expecting sexually-explicit evidence, he showed the Eurymedon Vase, followed by a photograph showing abused prisoners of war from a modern conflict zone. As the article discusses, this tactic differs from that adopted by other practitioners, who prefer to give a warning that possibly difficult content is about to be presented.

## 5. Assessing students

A challenge for practitioners is in ensuring the best assessment for each module while making sure that the curriculum as a whole enables students to encounter a range of assessments, from traditional methods to 'non-traditional' forms, which can take students out of any comfort zone of familiarity with essays and exams. These might include journals (case study 1), posters, wikis, websites (case study 1), quizzes and portfolios. An academic blog is a kind of assessment that may look relatively easy, but which presents particular challenges. It involves writing in a reflective fashion where students are encouraged to expose their own ideas, subject them to critique and to show that they can deepen them, rather than simply presenting them and then moving on. An advantage of group as opposed to individual assignments (e.g. presentations, wikis and posters) is in skilling students in listening to, and encouraging the development of, others and developing an understanding that people learn differently and see things from diverse perspectives.<sup>1</sup>

Key to embedding E&D is also enabling students to bring their own backgrounds, identities, skills and understandings to assessments. As outlined in case studies 3 and 4, this can facilitate belonging and engagement through the learning process. One of the forms of assessment taken by first-year Ancient History students at University College London involves [making films](#). This also gives the possibility of including students' own background as a reference point.

While some institutions may permit students to apply for an alternative method of assessment that meet the set criteria, others embed the freedom to choose assessment topics and methods in their assessment criteria.

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<sup>1</sup> Practitioners can also consult the practical guidance from the Equality Challenge Unit (2013).

As detailed in case study 1, Swansea University students are able to create their own reception projects based on any aspect from antiquity. The [Independent second-year project module](#) at the University of Nottingham also allows classical students to determine both the subject matter of their work and the mode of delivery.

Ensuring a diverse assessment portfolio has been identified as a way to close the attainment barrier for BME students. Ray Laurence has also discussed the need for an inclusive approach to assessment to support dyslexic students and thereby to improve the skills and experiences of all students (2010). The classics team at the University of Roehampton have discussed their attempts to embed varied assessment and delivery methods into the undergraduate Classical Civilisation curriculum (Barrow et al. 2009). Embedding E&D does not only benefit retention, attainment and success, therefore, it also promotes diversity competence and enhances belongingness and engagement. Embedding E&D is good for employability, good for internationalisation, good for retention, and good for success.

## 6. Case studies

The studies that follow are intended to demonstrate examples of current practice by classicists and also to demonstrate the range of possible ways to embed E&D. They include examples of work beyond the UK to show how the work of UK practitioners can be informed by examples of wider practice.

### 6.1 Non-traditional assessments and student-staff projects

**Institution:** Swansea University, Department of History and Classics.

**Institutional contact and contact details:** Evelien Bracke, [e.bracke@swansea.ac.uk](mailto:e.bracke@swansea.ac.uk), 01792 602974.

#### **Equality and diversity evidenced through:**

Alternative assessment for disabled students; wide variety of assessment and student-staff projects to include all student learning modes including:

- authentic assessment (CLP300\* and CLL200/300\*\*): teaching of primary school pupils is assessed);
- self-reflective report (CLP300, CLL200/300, CLP200\*\*\*);
- student-staff partnership (CLL200/300 and Literacy through Latin project: creation of website by students and staff: [www.ltresources.weebly.com](http://www.ltresources.weebly.com); Gorffennol online journal project: creation of bi-annual student research journal by students and staff, see <http://gorffennol.swansea.ac.uk>);
- student creation of own reception project based on any aspect from antiquity (CLP200);
- Latin and Greek community classes: student entrepreneurial project (students are responsible for their own teaching and finance - this is for postgraduates only);
- City States module: students vote on their assessment title;
- subject-specific admin/research assistant posts have been created for five students as a pilot to see what skills students can gain from working for one hour a week with a member of staff from our department on creating resources, gathering evidence and doing research;
- students can gain archival experience in the Richard Burton archives and Miners' Library, and museum experience in the Egypt Centre, both as volunteers and through modules (we have just set up two modules that open up the Egypt Centre work to Ancient History and Classics students, as we have found Greek and Roman artefacts that require labelling etc.).

\*CLP300 = Teaching Ancient History

\*\*CLL200/300 = Teaching Literacy through Latin

\*\*\*CLP200 = Level 2 Project

### **Rationale for introducing an aspect of E&D and summary of the case study:**

Our department has been working for the last five years on diversifying assessment to cater for students with varying abilities and to provide opportunities for the development of a range of skills. I have personally also been working on developing projects that allow students to take an active role in their learning process, particularly through authentic assessment but also extracurricular projects that rely on staff-student partnerships. The aim of all of these projects is to improve the student experience by providing them with a sense of ownership and active engagement in their learning process. Feedback so far is incredibly positive and student engagement with all the events I organise is high. I have a Facebook group particularly for keeping students up to date with events.

### **Benefits for the students:**

- increased satisfaction in studies;
- increased sense of ownership of the learning process;
- increased partnership with the staff: working alongside staff provides a much quicker development of skills;
- community spirit with other students engaged in these projects;
- a sense of intellectual achievement beyond essays;
- increased employability.

### **Benefits for the department/team/institution:**

Increased satisfaction in the work place.

### **Changes required by the institution/department/team for effective implementation:**

Increased awareness of the amount of time it takes to implement changes to the curriculum to set up projects and non-traditional assessments and to develop the projects further.

## **6.2: Peer assisted learning in Classics and Ancient History**

**Institution:** University of Bristol.

**Institutional contact and contact details:** Dr Genevieve Liveley, Department of Classics and Ancient History, School of Humanities, University of Bristol, 11 Woodland Road, Bristol, BS8 1TB, [g.liveley@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:g.liveley@bristol.ac.uk).

### **Equality and diversity evidenced through:**

Enhanced retention and attainment of students from lower participation groups.

### **Rationale for introducing an aspect of E&D:**

To trial a pilot peer assisted learning (PAL) scheme using appropriately trained student mentors/facilitators to support small independent study groups of (ten-20) first-year students. The PAL sessions would be student-led, planned and purposeful but also informal and friendly, aiming to help students adjust to the different styles and demands of university teaching and assessment; develop their independent learning and study skills; enhance their understanding of the subject matter of their course; and so better prepare for assessments. Other motivations included increased cohesion of student subject groups, increased social interaction, and increased confidence of students from non-traditional and widening participation backgrounds.

### **Summary of the case study:**

The PAL pilot was initiated at the start of the second semester (at Bristol, teaching block 2) in January 2010 and successfully completed its trial in December 2010, involving a total of more than 40 individual undergraduates and eight postgraduates in its independent study groups. The tracking of student activity related to the dedicated online PAL blackboard site indicates that many more students (80+) have accessed PAL resources online.

A pair of second- and third-year students facilitated fortnightly study support sessions, initially for groups of

first-year students only. When student attendance dropped in the middle of the first term, the sessions were also opened up to second years. Sessions included: essay planning and writing; the differences between school and university essays; referencing and footnoting; using essay feedback effectively; studying and revising for exams; doing well in exams.

Word-of-mouth recommendations among the undergraduates prompted the taught postgraduates to set up their own PG PAL which continued to run through the summer and focused particularly on practicing student presentations and sharing critical feedback. The PG PAL group dissolved as students completed their one-year programme in September 2010. In response to student requests, early in the 2010-11 session a weekly Beginners' Latin PAL group was set up to run in parallel with the key skills group, meeting in a lunch-hour slot immediately before a timetabled class to maximise student attendance. The weekly sessions, convenient timing, and subject-specific focus of this PAL group proved an immediate success with students and provided an enhanced model for future PAL delivery in the department and school.

#### **Benefits for the students:**

End-of-term, mid-term, and end-of-year evaluation forms were completed by PAL facilitators and by PAL group participants. Feedback from students and leaders was overwhelmingly positive, with 90%+ of respondents confirming that the PAL sessions:

- were pitched at the right level;
- were held at a convenient time;
- were personally useful;
- provided useful teaching/learning materials.

Comments from students included:

- “Students are clearly getting a lot out of it”;
- “They turn up with a list of questions in their head and we go through it”;
- “It really seems to help having another student explain things”;
- “It’s really good to see students having light-bulb moments”;
- “It’s useful to look again – properly – at the handbooks”.

#### **Benefits for the department/team/institution:**

A greater sense of student community, with second and third years helping first years to adjust to the independent learning environment and demands of university study. Students are now less likely to contact personal tutors with queries about referencing, revision techniques, etc., reducing staff workload (albeit minimally).

#### **Changes required by the institution/department/team for effective implementation:**

Following the successful trial in Classics and Ancient History, the pilot was expanded first across the School of Humanities (of which Classics is a part) and most recently (2013-14 on) the Faculty of Arts. The initiative has been rebranded as PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) and has been centrally timetabled so that the appropriate drop-in sessions appear in every student’s personalised timetable.

### **6.3 The Body, physical difference and disability in ancient Greece**

**Institution:** University of Toronto at Mississauga, Canada.

**Institutional contact and contact details:** Dr Lisa Trentin, Lecturer in Classics, Department of Historical Studies, University of Toronto at Mississauga, Mississauga, L5L 1C6, CANADA, [lisa.trentin@utoronto.ca](mailto:lisa.trentin@utoronto.ca).

#### **Equality and diversity evidenced through:**

The introduction of a new course (CLA390) on disability in ancient Greece (Fall 2012). This course will be followed (Winter 2015) by a complementary course (CLA391) on disability in ancient Rome. A former student from CLA390 (now graduated) is involved in the curriculum design and delivery of the 2015 course.

### **Rationale for introducing an aspect of E&D:**

In offering this course, my hope was to encourage students to think critically about what it has meant to be disabled throughout history. As the topic of disability is seldom addressed in the classics classroom, despite a) recent attempts to promote diversity in classrooms and curricula, b) the increase in the numbers of disabled students and staff in higher education, and c) the surge in new scholarship in this burgeoning field, I felt it important to introduce students to the topic and thus broaden their understanding of the lives and experiences of the ancients. By introducing students to the connection between ancient history and disability, we can provide them with new perspectives on issues that still resonate deeply today. Indeed, I believe we must work towards exposing students to disability perspectives so as to address the wide range of issues that 'disable' many people, the implications of which are important for all of us, whatever our ability.

### **Summary of the case study:**

In the fall term of 2012, I developed and delivered a course on 'The body, physical difference and disability in ancient Greece'. This course introduced students to the ancient Greek material on physical disability, combining disability studies perspectives alongside traditional historical analysis. Our aim was to explore 'self' and 'other' dynamics in the construction of dis/ability in order to challenge traditional interpretations about the place of people with physical disabilities in ancient Greece, and, in so doing, to reflect upon modern assumptions about, and attitudes towards, people with physical disabilities. As a class, we examined a wide variety of primary sources on disability – archaeological, medical, historiographical, literary, and visual – and evaluated the reliability of these sources and the contexts in which they were intended to be read and/or viewed. Through a series of case studies – hearing impairment, mobility impairment, speech impairment and visual impairment – students investigated the complex range of issues faced by those living with a disability in ancient Greece: How did the ancient Greeks understand and explain the causes and consequences of disability (medically, socially and religiously)? What accommodations, if any, were made for people with disabilities? How were people with disabilities treated within their community? How do modern ideas about disability differ from the past and can we judge an ancient society by our own norms? The course proved to be wonderfully successful, benefiting students in a number of ways.

### **Benefits for the students:**

The course was opened to students in the Disability Studies stream of Equity Studies at the St. George campus of the University of Toronto to allow students to take full advantage of a cross-disciplinary, collaborative learning experience. This was hugely successful. The course fostered engaging and reflective discussion and encouraged the sharing not only of factual information, but also of personal experience(s) and this, in turn, contributed to more meaningful learning.

One student in the course provided a particularly candid perspective on the importance of the subject, offering himself as a class case study: the student experienced a mild stutter during oral presentations and, coincidentally, was randomly placed in the group case study on speech impairments. The topic could have been rather uncomfortable or embarrassing for the student, and presenting all the more nerve-wracking because of his own condition; however, discussion with the student revealed that he had been helped immensely by the reassurance of his peers; the inclusive and comfortable learning environment helped "to steady his nerves". His resulting presentation on the effects of speech impairment on rhetoric and public speaking in the ancient Greek world argued against the traditional interpretation that a speech impediment was universally met with scorn. Rather, individuals with speech impediments could be successful public speakers, demonstrating that a number of individuals (e.g. Demosthenes) took steps to mitigate their impairments and became popular orators, lauded by the public. Indeed, his research into disability in ancient Greece further bolstered the student's confidence as he realised that *what* one said mattered as much as *how* one said it. Here exemplified, disability (as a personal experience) offered a lens through which the student was better able to engage with the discipline.

Following the completion of this course, two unanticipated events occurred which revealed to me the unique appeal of the course, in the way it challenged students to think 'outside' of the traditional curriculum:

- I had a student express interest in pursuing additional research on disability in antiquity. The student became my research assistant working on a project titled 'Disabled Soldiers and War Veterans in

Hellenistic and Roman Antiquity'. This project aims to track and analyse the injuries sustained by soldiers that shifted service under the successor kings of Alexander the Great, focusing specifically on King Pyrrhus of Epirus and his early encounters with the Roman Republic (280-275BC). The student was awarded the 2013 UTM Undergraduate Research Grant, the first such recipient in the Department of Historical Studies.

- 2 The Chair of my department received a testimonial from one of the students lauding the course and declaring that it had provided personal direction for aspirations in graduate study not previously considered.

**Benefits for the department/team/institution:**

The course added to the cross-disciplinary appeal of the department and it contributed to increased student interest from other disciplines in our courses. The enrolment for the CLA391 Roman course has increased two-fold from that of CLA390 Greek course.

**Changes required by the institution/department/team for effective implementation:**

Minimal changes required. Course prerequisites had to be reviewed by the instructor and academic counsellor if a student was not a Classics major.

## 6.4 Slavery in ancient Rome

**Institution:** Hamilton College, Clinton, New York.

**Institutional contact and contact details:** Barbara Gold, Edward North Professor of Classics Chair of Classics, Department of Classics, Hamilton College, 198 College Hill Rd. Clinton, NY 13323, [bgold@hamilton.edu](mailto:bgold@hamilton.edu).

**Equality and diversity evidenced through:**

The assessment came in essays written at the end of the course. In my course, on Ancient Comedy: Then and Now, I both contextualised issues like slavery and rape for students and also had them perform scenes, which gave them an opportunity to understand more clearly and to confront the significance of these potentially uncomfortable topics.

**Rationale for introducing an aspect of E&D:**

In an institution like my private college, where many of the students come from comfortable and well-off homes, I think it is especially important to make them confront difficult topics and to think and talk about them honestly in the context of their own lives and in their readings from other times and places. Using comedy as a social document and using humour as an avenue of approach enabled me to discuss the issues from many different points of view. Many students take classics courses precisely to avoid grappling with difficult social and cultural issues, so it is our job to use classical texts and material objects to force them to confront these issues and to make them uncomfortable. We need to make them realise that classical texts are not the safe, remote time and space that many think they are.

**Summary of the case study:**

Slavery in ancient Rome was different from slavery in America but no less horrifying. Roman comedy seems to present slaves who are smarter than their masters and often win, but this is a dramatic illusion. If we look carefully at Roman comedy, we find in its language a kind of double speak and concealment that allowed slaves to speak to several different audiences at once. Slaves and other subalterns speak in two different registers, and these must be discovered and analysed in order to prevent students from thinking that slaves were the happy and successful creatures who seem to be portrayed in the comedies. Most white/dominant students regard such issues as false, unreal and having nothing to do with them. One student of colour whom I taught had a very different reaction to these texts of slavery. He saw the plays as being commentaries about many different kinds of social relationships, which might have appealed to different parts of the audience (slaves, women, prostitutes, men) in different ways. He found a way of reading the plays that allowed marginalised and oppressed members of society and the audiences (and himself) to see themselves reflected in the plots and actions. This student showed me that we as teachers need to allow each student to find his or her own

approach to the difficult issues brought up in the plays, but we must also help that process along by showing them what lies beneath the surface. It is not a bad thing to be uncomfortable – sometimes that is the best way to learn.

**Benefits for the students:**

This approach to ancient literature unsettles presumptions, defamiliarises the familiar, makes the students engage with the messiness of life, and helps them to see what lies behind and beneath appearances. The teacher is taking risks in engaging with these topics, but she or he is also asking the students to take risks by stepping out of their comfort zones.

**Benefits for the department/team/institution:**

The benefits for the institution are enormous. How is it learning if students are allowed to be able to continue to think exactly as they always have? Or if they are allowed to study with and talk with only other students who are from similar backgrounds to theirs? Introducing difficult issues such as slavery, rape, and forced prostitution asks them to deal with important ethical issues in a way they probably never have done before. It does not allow them to gloss over the brutality and prejudices in the texts (and in life) by pretending they are funny or not relevant to them.

**Changes required by the institution/department/team for effective implementation:**

For my institution, the demographics of the students need to change; it is still too homogenously white and upper or middle class. This is happening to some degree but very slowly.

## 6. Conclusions

This guide has suggested some ways in which practitioners might facilitate an inclusive disciplinary culture in classical programmes. It has tried to show the variety of ways to bring varied approaches to the study of the ancient world. It has offered suggestions concerning how we can encourage students to reflect about the assumptions they bring to the study of classics. It has considered how to challenge certain still-prevailing assumptions about what classics is, and who should study it. It has explored how practitioners might promote diversity among learners and how they might enable students to understand the diversity of ancient cultures, bodies and experiences. Finally, while classics has been the focus of this guide, the principles and practices are transferrable to all disciplines of higher education study.

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## Contact us

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**The Higher Education Academy  
Innovation Way  
York Science Park  
Heslington  
York  
YO10 5BR**

**+44 (0)1904 717500  
enquiries@heacademy.ac.uk**

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