

A Conversation with Hal Haskell and Rebecca Davis

David Thomson and Mark Long

First effected under the auspices of the Associated Colleges of the South (ACS) in 1995, the Sunoikisis consortium today serves 14 member institutions. (Sunoikisis homages the rebel alliance once achieved among the cities of Lesbos in 428 B.C.) What students encounter in the fall—and so far, only in the fall—is the product of intensive 3-day summer seminars in which a course director, faculty and a guest expert debate, read and encounter the merits of a bibliography to be used for a course that will be simultaneously delivered for students enrolled in both sophomore- and junior-level classes.

Having just recently completed its funding period under the original and subsequent Mellon Foundation grants, Sunoikisis is about to go national and will be directed by Dr. Rebecca Davis, herself a classicist whose specialty is Latin poetry. The sponsoring organization will be the National Institute for Technology & Liberal Education. With its 94 member institutions and a continued subscription service that co-founder Dr. Hal Haskell calls “a lot of bang for the buck,” it seems Sunoikisis is on the verge of becoming a sustainable consortium and may very well create more interest in its model of integrated education.

In independent assessments of the consortium done by Susan Frost Consulting, the best application of the Sunoikisis model is realized among departments of 1.5 to 2.5 faculty members. Regardless of discipline, however, the reports emphasize that this model of integrating content delivery with the most common forms of technology suggests the successes and troubleshooting experiences of Sunoikisis could serve as a national model.

Hungering for the Culture Behind the Languages

David Thomson: In one of the evaluative reports on Sunoikisis, there was this statement: “Students today clamor for material culture connections.” What precisely does that mean?

Rebecca Davis: Archeology.

Hal Haskell: Historical inscriptions, whatever.

RD: They want to see it.

DT: So they want to see it, touch it.

HH: A traditional way of teaching a literature course is to do the literature and some confessional stuff. But that's a way to focus on the text itself and try to put it in context. What we can do—we can do it singly, I guess, but we don't have the expertise

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individually—is to bring all that additional stuff: archeology, epigraphy, whatever else there is to the class, to the common classes in particular. The common classes tend to—whatever we're calling them—tend to focus on not so much the text per se, although it revolves around the text, but we're not translating texts and understanding the subtleties of some of the particles and whatever, but rather what is the broader context and how is it illuminated by history, by archeology, by some philosophical perspective or this painting or whatever?

RD: Right. So, typically, this is what you are going to do in the classics. You're going to go into class and let's say I'm teaching a class on Latin poetry—because that's my specialty—

you're going to go into the class and read, and you're going to learn about rhythm. You're probably going to learn something about the allusion back to earlier literature, things like that. But if this is taught in a Sunoikisis course you're also going to learn the social history that produced this certain thing. You're going to learn about conditions of the time that might make people write in this way. You're going to compare some material culture. Here's art that kind of replicates what we're seeing here. You're going to see art that treats myth the same way literature treats mythology. You're going to get the background.

HH: There's no way in hell that any one of us in a single class could work up classes like that by ourselves. It just can't happen. You don't have the time. You can work up a section for 4th century class but I can't do that for every single week of the semester because it took me some weeks just to put together just this one class. So the students are really coming out way ahead in that regard: the material culture element, the cultural things, the social history.

RD: Yes. In one of the courses we talked about slavery as a special phenomenon and how it's reflected in the literature. And again I spent a lot of time researching that and that's something I research in my own work as well.

HH: Right. But students do want that broader context; we just don't have the time to do it. What we do in their tutorials quite often is focus on the text and that is what

the tutorials are designed for. You've got have to make sure they understand it, some particle buried in the middle of whatever and everything else. But it's the broader issues that we can deal with in our consortium classes and that's what the students say they're looking for. Traditionally, we can't give them that kind of course because of expertise and the time required to work up all of that singly.

RD: And that's what we're trying to get in classics. In your first—and maybe even your second—year you're doing your language course and just trying to learn how to read. But the whole point of learning to read Greek and Latin is not to read to read Greek and Latin, but so that you can get at the culture behind it. So when we do these courses with these larger themes and we pull on all these extra backgrounds, we're saying you're reading the text and here is everything about the culture you need to understand this text. It wasn't written in a vacuum. There's all this other stuff. And that's history, that's material culture, that's archeology.

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It's so funny. I just had a friend who has his Ph.D. in ancient history and he was interviewing at a classics conference, but he also interviewed at a big historians conference. And somebody asked him, “Where's your archive?” And they're expecting a whole set of texts—where are all these documents you look at?—and he's like, “I wrote my dissertation on the concept of East and West and archaic Greek theory. I have a few works of literature where it's mentioned. And the rest of it I'm pulling together from archeology.”

DT: Wouldn't you say that this is a fairly recent paradigm shift, this fervent desire, this hunger for what you're calling material culture?

HH: Well, I don't know. I think that because we've had civilization courses in translation. So we've had these two related lines where you have lit courses that focus on the language and then civilization courses often taught in English where you do Romans and Greeks civilizations and how and when it happened.

RD: And those are often the courses that get people into the language. I took a mythology course, and that was my first classics course, and that's what got me into it, doing classics. So we've had those things.

HH: But they're often separate courses and now it's one course essentially, all that stuff.

RD: And it's an original course because it's integrating those things. It's sort of being the

big survey but you're seeing how it's focused in this one area. Classics as a discipline is very interdisciplinary.

HH: It's easy to do that. We're not forcing anything. This is just a different way of sort of packaging in a more comprehensive, innovative way.

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DT: You're better enabled to do the disciplinary study you always craved to do or the interdisciplinary presentations you always wanted to do anyway.

HH: Right. We just often did it in separate classes, but didn't integrate it as well we should. We covered the various disciplines, let's say, the approaches, in different classes. Now it's being pulled together more effectively.

Mark Long: Well, I know that for us in literature classes—at least when I was starting college—I mean, out in the boonies more or less where everything was still very behind, we still had the hangover from New Criticism where you specifically want to look at the text in a vacuum so I think that with that as my

background that's why all this particularly interests me.

[Laughter]

Because it always struck me as really odd, then, the prospect of doing that.

DT: Mark placed that well for us. We did have instructors we had to overcome and ask, “What about the history? What about the politics? What about the philosophy? What was happening in the newspapers? You know, what was public entertainment all about?”

HH: That's what we're doing.

DT: We had to pull that out of some instructors or stumble upon it on ourselves because of different theoretical approaches that had evolved basically from structuralism forward.

RD: And we eventually in classics get the literary theory as well. And so some of these lectures are going to be on, you know, we've had lectures that are like, okay, “We're going to talk about Foucault today and how that impacts criticism of this text.” You'll have lectures that look at the same texts from different literary viewpoints, which is interesting.

HH: But as a whole discipline we haven't suffered from everybody looking at a text in a vacuum.

ML: Once again you get the benefit, like you were telling your students, different teaching styles and different approaches.

HH: And that's critical. When you go to a big graduate program somewhere they're a business with a whole bunch of folks from different perspectives and management styles.

RD: You get the dialogue, which is really fun. We have two Homer specialists teach courses for us and when we taught Homer, man, we had a couple of discussions where they were going at it. And students were saying, "Oh, this text is however many hundreds of years old and yet here are two people who really disagree completely about how you're going to interpret it and approach it." I think they get to see the discipline actually in action instead of just received wisdom monolithically.

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HH: Historiography or whatever in that Homer course reminds me of Schliemann and that whole business and we get that and it's less and less part of students' conversation sort of culturally to talk much about classical things. It's not the whole Schliemann and the response to him and the scholarly negative response. It's part of what we ought to be aware of as classicists.

DT: This (technology center) is quite the launching pad for your coursework.

HH: It certainly enables us to work together over distance.

RD: The courses that we teach are team-taught courses; they just happen to be taught across all over the country, from Virginia down to Texas, as opposed to being on a single campus. So if you're talking about the model of the course—and that's how it differs from distance learning where you have one faculty member with students scattered all over—you have multiple faculty members working together and students working together. This is a hybrid system, in which each of these individuals has been teaching their expertise. But what's different is that they work together and supplement one another's approaches and expertise.

DT: How many students, then, are coming together through this collaborative, team-taught approach?

RD: As many as 25, in upper level Greek. I mean to deal with 25 students is practically unheard of. Maybe at UT Austin. I've taught at major universities and never had that many students in a classics course.

DT: So how many students do you currently have in your Latin class?

RD: Nineteen, coming from seven different campuses.

DT: What sort of student do you see enrolling in your courses?

RD: I can tell you they have a mean verbal SAT of 631 and a quantitative of a 651, slightly higher level scores than the overall population. Two-thirds are juniors and seniors. That is one thing about these courses: these are advanced courses. We expect you to have not just finished introductory Latin sequence and then take this course.

We do offer — this is another interesting thing we can get into — the courses are offered at two different levels so we have different

reading amounts depending on whether you're at the 200 or 300 level. So if you're in the 200 level you read the extra stuff in English; you're still expected to know it but we understand that you may not be reading as much. And that's something we adapted because there were institutions that really wanted to do the courses and just didn't have the students ready yet. So there's that. Their GPAs average 3.4.

Instruction Adaptations

HH: Probably the biggest challenge is how we as instructors and lecturers have to adapt in our teaching style and lecture. You have to keep the student always in mind because you don't have the visual feedback of the student responding to you, or not responding, directly in front of you. I like to lecture with my own students in front of me just so I get some feedback, but the other 17 students you don't see. Sure, they respond by chatroom, but I don't see them. So I have to employ techniques to keep them in the loop. For the students joining the course from other campuses I build in pauses to engage in conversation. You pose questions, sometimes to groups, sometimes to individuals. You can imagine students panicking, as they would in your own class. It took us a while to get used to rethinking space.

HH: There are several levels of participation for faculty. First, there is the course director from one of the participating campuses. And then there are individual tutors from

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each campus. We also give guest lectures. I ran the Greek class last Wednesday in the common class and provided materials. Faculty and students from other campuses were connected by the web. They hear the audio and participate in the chatroom. One of the good things about this format is that students get to hear faculty engage in conversation, which means faculty are modeling how to have a professional discussion.

RD: There are two things that are unique for us. First there is the virtual classroom, using live stream audio. We used to have to send people to link to the stream. It has a chatroom and an html lecture, which is then archived. We log this discussion to help with the calendar issues. Some classes begin in August and some in September. That means courses start in the middle of September and our institutions don't all have the same fall breaks.

DT: So, you essentially have a 12-week course?

HH: Well, in the common portion of the class, yes. But my students are meeting with me before then in the typical tutorial setting.

RD: Now the Latin class students are doing study questions in advance of the lecture. The lecturer will read the answers before class and so find another way of engaging students. This method encourages students to synthesize lecture, readings and writing, as well as input from other students. This practice of having students respond to questions ahead of a lecture came from Rhodes, where there is a substantial writing requirement built into this course, which is now a part of the official curriculum.

RD: Many ask us how is the credit handled. Well, it's handled at each institution. Students have the additional advantage of meeting with peers from other campuses.

HH: I'm responsible for turning in the final grade for the two students in my class. On the other hand, we share the grading. I grade one of the questions and get my responses to the course director. And there are pro's and con's to that. The students in my classes are used to the way I grade. One of the unintended consequences, and strengths, of this assessment strategy is that students who have figured out how to work me will encounter a new grader and meet a new level of rigor. That is, they're being evaluated by folks they don't know. But that's going to happen in life. We try to help students not be intimidated by this, but they're going to be subject to evaluation by a whole range of people and one of the nice outcomes of this whole business is preparing them for the real world out there.

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Collaborative Benefits

RD: And it's probably reassuring for them as well.

It's kind of interesting for us, because all the faculty really like working together and collaborating. It still works well for students, but in a different way. It's more

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competitive for them. The different institutions are actually strapping against one another. One lecturer from Millsap College said her students have gotten a lot closer, that they never had cohesiveness before. They've gotten a lot closer now because working in a group in this class setting it pushes them to compete against other campuses. Now, they're not just one of three in a class...

HH: Knowing each other's strengths and weaknesses.

RD: Out of their comfort zones.

HH: Yes, now they're out there.

RD: Now they're having to step up and really perform. It's been interesting to see, and we're really looking for ways to get them to collaborate. But I think the competition aspect has been very useful to them.

HH: Yes, they're working on two levels. Their on-campus bonding is strengthened, but there is also a loyalty to the classes in which they feel a part of the whole.

DT: So, do you see any of this new competitive culture fostering students' submission to scholarly articles or entering graduate school? In short, what do you see yourself concretely preparing them for?

HH: With the various readers for each course, students are receiving exposure to faculty members with different expectations. It's not just about assessment. In my field, the history of archeology, I can bring that to class and another faculty member can bring philosophy to the class. So, it's not just different assessment tendencies, but different expertise brought to the fore. Our students come out ahead there, for not just any campus has an expert in medieval Latin for example.

RD: They're not going to get an expert in 4th century Greek oratory here, but they will get that from Furman.

HH: If I had taught a 4th century course all on my own, I would have worked it up

as best as I could, but it's not my particular field. So the students are being exposed to specializing in a whole range of disciplines that they would not get otherwise unless they were in a huge department.

RD: If they want to go on to graduate school, they're getting a much better preparation. And I think a lot of times students want to go to graduate school because they get close to the professors and think they want to do that, but in this setting they're qualifying themselves.

One of the interesting things we found out from a former student, one of your students in fact, Hal, is how he believed this course is preparing him for life in the business world and learning to work with people over distances.

HH: As more and more offices are spread out physically, and even globally, these offices are communicating electronically. And it's not just that. It's communicating in all sort of different ways. Like chatrooms. Moderated. Not moderated. This is another of the unintended consequences. That student is an accountant. He said he's done quite well in inter-office communication. He's way ahead of all of his peers.

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RD: What they're getting is the best possible education they can get, whether that means graduate school or not.

HH: The class method varies the academic experience, because it brings to the fore an experience students wouldn't normally have. The tools that we use to make that happen are the tools used in the business world.

RD: We also have students who want to go on to graduate school. And one of the advantages as we're preparing for the classes is that we bring in guest experts. For example, we did had a specialist in 4th century oratory. She ran this seminar. And so faculty members who haven't studied that work since they were graduate students get an exposure. They build a curriculum together and the guest experts come in to lecture. And one of the advantages of the course is that students get to see the academic superstars. And then those experts who sit on graduate school search committees get to see what the level of the curriculum is here, which isn't always clear. But all of our curriculum is out there. That's another consequence we didn't really think about when we were putting this together.

HH: Of course most of the jobs out there for classicists are not in large research

institutions, so having our coursework so transparent is really critical for our students.

RD: I've heard so many people who've gotten interviews and who've taught at one of the institutions hiring classicists just want to talk about this program.

HH: We interviewed for my sabbatical replacement a few years ago. That transparency in our curriculum made all the difference in the world. So for younger faculty, this program is really pushing them on. I was overwhelmed by the quality of the applicant pool.

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DT: Do you yet know whether students have come to one of the small liberal arts schools in the consortium because of the consortium?

HH: Possibly.

RD: We know of one student deciding whether he would go to Rhodes or Southwestern. You know what, in the consortium you get both. Realistically, here there are 1.5 classicists. Hal could not offer the variety of classes of the consortium.

HH: That means with only 1.5 classicists, an institution can offer a full classics major through the consortium.

ML: You said you had some unintended consequences in terms of teaching style. In terms of faculty interaction, are there any other unintended consequences?

HH: I didn't anticipate the intensity of the summer seminar. It's the most intense graduate course nightmare ever. That's because you have a whole range of articles you're preparing to present to the whole group. You really have to bust your chops to get ready. But as a result you have a very intense weeks. That translates into institutional and faculty development. It's perhaps a better collegial relationship in our virtual department than one often has in the traditional academic department.

RD: Someone said that he gets along better with his virtual colleagues than the ones who office just next door.

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DT: So would you say your summer seminars are content, rather than pedagogy, driven?

RD: Before we start the summer seminar, we tell everyone this is the sort of course we want. Participants come out of it with a syllabus, study questions and lecture topics. We also know who will do what, well ahead of time.

Another benefit is that administrators are discovering that senior faculty are getting rejuvenated themselves. We mention that you learn new teaching styles in preparing for these courses. But you take that back to your typical, face to face courses as well. If you prepare for student input, you're going to lecture a little better. It makes you interested in the teaching all over again. If you're rethinking a course every time, it becomes very useful.

HH: Having colleagues facing similar issues we find there are common challenges in life a small college. The consortium provides another meeting ground to talk about these things.

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RD: When I taught, in a department of two, I never saw the one colleague assigned to the honors program. If you're in a situation like that, now you have all these new colleagues and a regularly scheduled meeting time.

HH: It's been a great opportunity for mentoring as well. As a new faculty member, you really need some mentoring and some help. We can mentor our junior colleagues on a fairly regular basis and so get away from local politics. Accordingly, our junior faculty feel quite comfortable dealing with the senior faculty of our consortium.

DT: Does the consortium help in promotion and tenure applications?

HH: Generally, faculty members are exceptionally conservative when it comes to teaching methodology. So, using technology in support of a program to those who've never touched a machine can be viewed with suspicion. Therefore, it's a real trick sometimes. And junior faculty can experience some real anxiety in their participation in the consortium. Now, if we happen to be on the tenure committee, that's no problem. But that can be luck of the draw. How participation in the consortium is viewed varies from institution to institution. It won't be viewed as counting against you.

RD: This has been changing. It's getting better. Ohio State just rewrote its criteria to how participation would be viewed. As a junior faculty member I came here before going to the University of the South. There, I didn't teach the Latin course, because someone else

was doing it. But the next semester I taught a course that intersected in part with the Latin seminar. So, because I had done the curriculum presentation for the consortium, it was really easy to work it out no matter how my participation with Sunoikisis was viewed. It really helped me to know that I had half the material already.

HH: But to a large extent faculty evaluation relates to ignorance as to what we're really doing. It's not just answering student emails. I think people also react to the fact that it is not live interaction with the class.

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Not “Distance Learning”

ML: I was in the English department three years before moving over to publishing. In that time, we began doing distance learning classes. And one thing we discovered was that teachers preferred being in front of their students because they enjoyed the face to face interaction. What most of them experienced in this more typical form of distance learning was bookkeeping. How do you think that you transfer that sort of face to face interaction to an online course, especially the self-paced classes finished usually in the last two weeks?

HH: My son just took the state-required computer literacy course for Texas high schools. He did so online through Texas Tech. Funnier, he did so in four days. What he retained, I don't know. He does all sorts of things with computers. . .

RD: Yes, he actually worked here.

HH: But that's the kind of thing we have to strive to avoid.

RD: One, our courses are called Institutional Collaborative Courses, or ICCs. They are team-taught courses, because that is a model a lot of our institutions understand. They have these team-taught courses. And we have light in our sessions. I think that is important to our students, because they sign on to have that small liberal arts college experience and so they want those personal relationships with their instructors. They don't want to be at a large university. So we tell them we're giving you the benefit of being at a large university, but you reach it through Rhodes, University of the South or Southwestern.

HH: Going back to how do we market what we do in the consortium, administrators may feel reluctant to push this because it could be understood to be distance learning and therefore contrary to what their institutions are about. So what has been articulated

very carefully is that Sunoikisis does in fact enhance the strengths of the liberal arts college. There's a whole lot to like about it, but it's tough to encapsulate it into a couple of sound bites.

New Directions for the Consortium

ML: In terms of the administrators' response, one of the things that came out in *The Marketing of Higher Education* I recall is the problem of funding the consortium after the grant money runs out. So, what is the administrative response since then? And secondly, when do you believe the program will become self-sustaining?

RD: Well we've been wrestling with that. The short answer is that this program was started with 16 institutions. But it's actually going national this year and I'm going to be directing it nationally under the auspices of NITLE, the National Institution for Technology in Liberal Education. We'll have 93 institutions eligible to participate. Not all of them will participate and we've found out that different institutions have different needs. And that's fine. For the next few years what we're looking at is what is sustainable and what do we really need. We'd like to see the institutions pay for participants to come to the summer seminar. That would make the program more sustainable. But for example we have an undergraduate research symposium and that actually is completely sustainable because one institution hosts it and the others send students. So as people are starting to see the program and know about it more that's going to make it become more sustainable.

So the issues that you're asking about—having administrators pay for it—“Will you pay for your faculty members to travel to it?” and “Would you pay for the course director?” It would be important to have the course director be paid higher because they're doing a lot of administrative work and that's typical for a team-taught course. So there are a lot of models where we can expect that to will continue. Right now it's being covered by NITLE and it's sustainable in this sense that NITLE is an organization is very important to sustainability because before they were getting everything free because it was all funded and now they're actually paying it. So, as they pay in, one of the things they get is this program.

HH: So I guess the question to the institutions is: “Is it worth the cost of admission?” That is, the dues to remain a member of NITLE to get this as a return.

RD: And this isn't the only thing they're getting; they're getting a lot of other things.

“So I guess the question to the institution is: ‘Is it worth the cost of admission?’”

HH: Yes. I don't know what their dues are—it's not cheap—so there is obviously considerable conversation among the institutions, but if you look at the bigger picture from our perspective they're getting a whole lot of bang for their buck. That is, because we're doing things cooperatively and collaboratively you're getting a whole lot of expertise and resources and whatever that prorate it out to each institution to where it doesn't cost that much but the return is absolutely massive.

“ . . . if you look at the literature, team-taught courses are generally acknowledged to be better to help students develop integrative thinking. ”

RD: And, as we explain in the courses, it's not like they're paying for another teacher to teach another course; they'd be teaching that course anyway. And, if you look at the literature, team-taught courses are generally acknowledged to be better to help students develop integrative thinking and all those other nice things. But, they're expensive because you're paying for more than one faculty per one—you know, one student is being taught by three faculty in one—or something like that. So, already the model the way it is set up is leveraging existing courses to get a team-taught course so it's already adding things on to that and I think that's a good thing about the sustainability model as well.

As I said, one of the things in Kirp's article is—and the article that first came out in *The Chronicle* was even more biased—there is very much this portrayal of the faculty striving against the administrators and that's not really the case. That was one faculty's point of view. And Hal was . . .

HH: I was misquoted.

RD: And he has a great relationship with our administration.

HH: These blasphemous things were misquoted.

RD: This [the grant reports] was done by outside evaluators, it's not like an inside job by us. This is Susan Frost from Emory University and Deb Bolton from Virginia Tech who came in and have a lot of experience in this area. It was great that we got into that book but he sent a graduate student who interviewed people and kind of . . . I don't know.

HH: In many ways it was almost like being interviewed—as it turned out—being interviewed by a newspaper reporter so that the temptation there was to help sell books and not necessarily communicate reality.

DT: I picked up on that.

RD: But there is certainly a good point that was made that sustainability is an issue.

That's true about all of our programs.

Transferring the Model

ML: I know that reading from some of the earlier reports and some of the documentation on the Web site about the Mellon grant was the viability then of moving this model into other areas so that people could use this. Has that happened yet in terms of people coming in and studying the model that you have here and applying it?

RD: We're looking at that in a couple of different ways.

First, the Appalachian College Association is doing inter-campus courses right now and they're doing them for credit and they're actually dealing with the credit exchange issue which is one we just didn't even want to tackle. So that's one example of another consortium that's coming online.

We've got other collaborative programs that are looking at inter-campus courses. There's actually a GIS course that we support now that was done by the Sigma Project which Hal's on the board for. GIS is Mediterranean archeology and it's an inter-campus course that's taught with actually just one professor and then three or four institutions sustaining it and each institution has a mentor on campus but he doesn't do any of the teaching. But there's another course that saw this model and has continued it and they're actually doing collaborative projects as well for that. So there have been examples as well.

This evaluation that just came out, part of it was the assessment model—the how-to guide—so if you start something similar and you would like to assess how it's going and this is the first time anything like this has been assessed it's all there. You can adapt it and use it. This just came out this summer, in the fall, and so we're looking at taking it to some of our other programs now and seeing as far as being able to assess some of our other collaborative programs. So we have some other inter-institutional courses being done in different ways. Part of my new job starting in January will also be getting inter-campus courses going nationally in other areas. For example, right now NITLE is supporting a theater program (which I don't know a lot about).

One of the things that we see is that for something like this to work there is a certain niche that it fits into. Classics departments are great because they're small departments and very committed faculty members who really want their students to succeed. So you need to find a program where it's really going to matter. This isn't going to work in an English department because there are enough faculty members probably. (Unless

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it is going to be that one obscure English seminar.) So I think that's one of the issues to consider. I talked to someone from the Great Lakes Colleges Association a couple weeks ago and they're actually looking into doing a course like this on Swahili in the Midwest.

HH: Wow.

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RD: So, yes, other people have come to us and talked about “how can we do this?” and we work on it. I talked to someone in—I actually get calls all the time actually—Boston at an institution that was interested in how we have this set up. If you read the literature collaboration is becoming more and more about—and now with the technology—finding ways to collaborate to take money to work together and work smarter. So people are starting to look at it.

ML: So you could have 50 students in a class soon then?

[Laughter]

RD: We'd have to talk about other ways of doing that. But, you do have the whole campus mentor so that's going to make the lectures a little bit harder with discussion going on.

HH: Yes.

RD: But you do have the home campus mentors. It reminds me of when I was in graduate school and we had 300 people in a mythology class that met two days a week for lecture and then once a week you had discussion section with your TA and you had a smaller class. So, that model exists as well.

Pedagogical Negotiations

ML: Well, in terms of practical issues once again, when you talk about sometimes it's good to work with people that are far away from you as opposed to officing right next door, just in a practical sense, were there issues early on or ongoing issues . . . I mean, one of the problems is . . . I mean, we do a lot of in-house textbook development and one of the problems we always have with the larger departments is like “No one else is going to tell me how to teach my subject because I'm the one who knows how to teach it.” And that's kind of ego and politics I'd say are the biggest problems that I deal with all the time.

RD: And this is something that I think if you want to get more background on you should look at some of the literature on team teaching. There is a book by Barbara Gross Davis from Berkeley which is THE book on team teaching. She outlines “These are the kinds of issues you can face” and having read it in the fall and thinking back about Sunoikisis, it was like “Oh yeah!” But I think for us having the summer seminar we work through—and there are arguments here when someone says, “I want the course to focus more on this” and someone else says “No. It needs to focus on that”—you work out those issues. But the fact that you have a seminar where you build the course together instead of coming in; it’s not like Chris Blackwell came to Hal and said, “Perhaps it needs to be like that.”

HH: Normally.

[Laughter]

RD: Normally it’s not like Chris would be coming to Hal and saying, “Here’s the course we’re going to teach and you’re going to do this lecture and here’s what you have to lecture on particularly.” Hal has the freedom; he’s given a topic or actually they work together to kind pick the topics.

HH: We discuss the range of stuff that needs to be covered for the class and then we’d kind of divide it up and then kind of package it. You know, they understand “I’d like to do this because it interests me . . .” and so on.

RD: You match things to your interests and then you have control over what’s being in it. So that is an issue you have to kind of work through getting the group. And it helps to have a good course director who is listening to everybody and kind of building people toward the consensus. And I think a lot of that comes from the face-to-face meetings over the summer and then that continues through the tentative syllabus that’s worked out over the rest of the summer and we have it ready in the fall and you work out those sorts of questions.

But the exams, that was one of the early problems with that, they were giving these exams and it was taking a month or more to get them back, and we had to work out the administrative best way to do it.

HH: Yes.

RD: Hal was directing this course and I was working with him and we had this elaborate timeline of, okay, faculty will submit an exam question by this date, everyone will read each others’ exam questions, we will have a conference call by this date, after

“You match things to your interests and then you have control over what’s being in it.”

which the course director will be in charge of actually putting together the exam based on all of that discussion. Then, the exam will be given; the course director will get all the exams; different faculty members are assigned to grade different questions; they'll give their input back to the course director.

HH: By a certain date.

“Our course delivery system, the other nice thing about it is that it has different levels of users—it’s very granular . . .”

RD: By a certain date.

[Laughter]

He will send those grades out to the individual campus mentors who, because they have the ultimate authority on grading which makes their students feel better, can say, I agree with that (or not). I think for the most part they probably agree. They might make changes because they meet with their students for tutorials one or two times a week—or three maybe—they might say, you know, my students didn’t really study that that much so I’m going to cut them some slack there. Or, they might say “My students did this a lot and you should

grade them harder.” David was saying for the Latin class, actually, he expected his students who just took this Latin exam to use a lot more Latin on their exams and was very hard on them if they didn’t and told them that in advance. We had to work out this whole process on how to do that.

Our course delivery system, the other nice thing about it is that it has different levels of user—it’s very granular—it has students, faculty, and then the course director. So there’s three different levels of user type and each has different abilities. So we built things in that kind of help us manage it better.

But, figuring out how to manage it has been important. That being said, the one thing we’ve found in doing collaborations in a lot of areas has been that just do it first and then figure out the rest. If you can get people motivated who want to do it—I mean that’s what happened in Classics—if we want to do this we’re going to make it work. So you have to sit back as you get into it and wonder how are we going to make this work?

HH: But you’re right; you have to plunge into it. As Rebecca says, faculty members are not very good at being told what to do, and so if there isn’t a sort of faculty buy-in from the get go, from the ground floor, it’s not going to work. I think administration has seen this as a kind of cool model and we can offer courses this way and put the word out that departments probably ought to adopt this model. But that’s the kiss of death if administration says this probably a good model for us.

[Laughter]

We were just very fortunate in the mid-90s with some really dedicated faculty members in Classics within the consortium who—I mean we all faced the same issues of small programs and not the resources we need and this, that, and the other—were really dedicated and energetic and saw that this sort of direction was the way to go to address those problems and strengthen our programs. And so it was basically a faculty initiative. We’ve been extremely fortunate that there has been faculty buy-in from the get go—it was “our” idea kind of deal—and for our benefit as opposed to being an administrative wish list kind of stuff.

The Most Intense Seminar Imaginable

ML: So when you have your summer development seminars, how many courses are you developing at a time?

RD: One.

ML: Just one at a time?

RD: A three-day seminar for one course.

We’ve gotten a little bit better, I mean it used to, the first one I came to Hal and I and Kenny—there was three of us for that first course—there was another guy who had to leave and we were reading all day long and you had dinner and then read at night. It was grueling.

HH: That was a little excessive.

RD: Especially when you had to do your reading at night.

HH: You had to cram for the next day.

RD: So what happened is it’s like a graduate seminar except you’re not responsible for all the reading. Theoretically you are—Holly reads all of hers—but for other faculty members they will divide up the reading and then report to each other.

HH: We’d read all of the articles for the most part.

DT: So who comes up with these readings?

“ . . . faculty members are not very good at being told what to do, and so if there isn’t a sort of faculty buy-in from the get go, from the ground floor, it’s not going to work. ”

RD: The guest expert. And the course director work together to develop it.

HH: The course director is an expert him or herself, but the course director kind of knows the parameters of the course and the sorts of areas it would be useful for us to develop for ourselves and that's invaluable.

“And that’s a way of getting them into a higher level of reading.”

RD: And there's negotiation so like this summer Susan Lake didn't know so much about how we did courses. She was from USC. But she gave Chris a whole bibliography. He looked at it and added a few things. So that's working for us as well. And one of the things they're looking at is we want readings for our students to do as well. So we're kind of evaluating readings: this is a good idea, this can go into this lecture, this is way too whatever for them, this will be a really good article for them to read. And that's a way of getting them into a higher level of reading.

DT: Absolutely.

RD: So having a guest expert—and you know we've had some big names—and it's been interesting for them to come and say, “Oh wow, what's going on here?”

HH: Yes. This is what small colleges are doing. Again that has to do with making our stuff transparent so the Mellon Foundation, or anyone, can see what we're doing online. Our guest experts do tend to come from the big graduate school programs.

RD: But, for them it would be like putting together a graduate seminar, a three-day graduate seminar. And there's the food.

HH: The food is key.

[Laughter]

RD: It's the Associated Colleges of the South so there's a lot of food out. That helps us get through it. Coffee. Diet soda.

HH: A lot of coffee.

ML: So each semester, then, on average how many courses are you doing online?

RD: Right now we're doing three. Well, okay, there's two for the program and then I'm supporting a third one as well, which is that GIS program.

DT: Two is standard?

RD: Yes. Two.

ML: Two courses a semester though?

RD: Two courses every fall.

ML: Okay.

RD: And plus we've been doing an archaeology class every spring. So it's small. This isn't like a huge program but it's enough extra like we said for Hal to get his program.

DT: Now, so, is it possible to get a bachelor's in classics studies only because of this consortium at your institution?

HH: Well, it existed before, but it is just a heck of a lot stronger now. Our students are far better prepared now having been exposed to other faculty, a lot of range of expertise, and other students, more than just one or two others who are majoring.

“Our students are far better prepared now having been exposed to other faculty, a lot of range of expertise, and other students, more than just one or two others who are majoring.”

DT: So like 21 core hours or something like that?

HH: Our classics emphasis is two languages plus stuff in translation; I forget exactly what it is. Because it's interdisciplinary by definition you've got languages, you've got literature, philosophy, art history, history, you know, whatever.

DT: So you didn't have to handle all of these courses by any means, previously, now they just come to you better prepared?

Tempus Fugit

HH: Well, no, I still have the same teaching load I ever did. These collaborative courses in the fall are just in lieu of upper-level courses.

RD: So he would have these two Greek students. They'd probably come to your office and read Greek. The difference is they're just getting up a higher level.

When I taught at Rhodes, here's what happened in classics. When I was hired into Rhodes I was told I'd be teaching a three and three load and you'll have some independent studies. And so I had a four and five load. And one of my independent

studies was ten students taking Latin. And so in a lot of classics departments if you're committed and you want your majors you're doing it anyway.

HH: We were talking about a four-four this year: four in the morning and four in the afternoon.

“ . . . the fact of the matter is it doesn't save me any time because it's a higher level course for me as well as one of the instructors. ”

[Laughter]

RD: So, and you can say, okay, an independent study with two students it's not like you're having to grade 20 students, but you're still doing a seminar.

HH: Maybe there's some hope with some administrators that it would save money because it would save time to teach more, but the fact of the matter is it doesn't save me any time because it's a higher level course for me as well as one of the instructors. Not only is it a richer course for the students, but it really raises the bar for all of us so I don't save any time. I spend more time probably on these collaborative courses overall than I do on stand alone single campus courses.

RD: The money thing is what I really talk about; it's the money thing comparing courses where you're leveraging everyone's needs.

HH: At Southwestern they haven't really worried too much since they teach a whole bunch of small classes anyway so as Rebecca was saying it doesn't make any difference. Other schools may have some issues with just two students making a class. That's not a problem for me. So I'd be teaching the same number of classes regardless of whether or not we have these inter-campus courses.

DT: Has the consortium helped shape the local discussions on what a Classics curriculum should be or who should be teaching those courses?

HH: We can provide a broader context for curricular or staffing issues. We have to be careful; we can't step on a dean's toes. We can't go in as a consortium and tell the dean at institution X that you ought to retain so and so because we think so ourselves because that's overriding their purview. So, it can be tricky politically but nonetheless we are out there acting as a sounding board.

ML: So the big thing that you have coming up in the near future, then, is adding a whole ton of schools potentially?

Growing Pains

RD: Right. We're actually looking at developing another course in addition to our regular schedule. We have a regular cycle of courses, that's another thing that we've worked out—a five-year cycle of courses based on curriculum at other institutions and also based on graduate school reading lists so that we know that these things that aren't being taught—you might not be able to teach by yourself—that need to be taught. So there are things that are always taught. We're never going to teach a Virgil class because everyone is going to teach that anyway. So that's kind of where the curriculum is built around the fact that a set curriculum means that we've been able to bring in institutions over the years because there's some faculty asking, "How come we can't teach medieval Latin this year?" because I taught it last year. But maybe the next time it comes around—because we say "This is it, this is the order it's coming in" programs might realign themselves.

“ . . . it can be tricky politically but nonetheless we are out there acting as a sounding board.”

We have Cage who's been coming to the seminars and lecturing for years but never had students, but he had students for the first time this year. And Haj is the other one who's coming every year and lecturing and she had students for the first time this year and her students love it. And they're the ones who are working as a group more and competing with the other schools. So, we're really trying to bring in more institutions. We're also developing another course, a gateway course for classics, which will be a kind of an introduction to the discipline of classics, a "what you need to know to be a classicist" is the idea. Some schools teach a class like that and some don't, so we're looking at some curricular materials for that. So that's another issue that's coming up.

DT: So it sounds like you may need a publisher.

[Laughter]

ML: So, in terms what you are looking at in making this jump to adding all these schools is it mainly administrative challenges you're facing or is there a technical component there in terms of handling that load?

RD: The technology? You know, there will be . . . in the course delivery system we have is home grown and built for us and we're talking about whether we should switch it to something else for support issues. I work for NITLE, an organization in transition; in fact we're moving from being the AJ Tech Center, which is a member of NITLE to NITLE. I had a job that was regional and now it's national. But at the same time our

technical support is done by our parent organization which also includes R-STOR and J-STOR if you know anything about them. R-STOR is going to be out there; they're going to be running things for us. It's kind of nice. They're going to have our server up there and keep it working. Because now it's like Hal and I were here streaming and what happened one night it just stopped working and so I'm like, okay, I'm going to stop it and start it again, which is how we fix everything.

“The content is what drives the program rather than the technology.”

[Laughter]

And it worked. It's a bandwidth issue. Everybody's stream is buffering or communicating, whatever they're calling it these days. Technology will probably need to change as we get financial support for it. But, there may be a change. We might look at different systems. We'll certainly probably still be streaming. Again, we'd like to do video; that may be something we explore in the future, but we're always held back by what the bandwidth is.

ML: Like you said: the lowest common denominator.

RD: Right.

HH: The content is what drives the program rather than the technology.

RD: In the early years of these courses there were technological problems and there were complaints about it, and we're very happy now that there just aren't complaints for the most part, and people just don't even pay attention to it and that's what we really it to be like.

HH: Faculty members and students feel therefore more comfortable with it.

RD: Then, other issues I think are just getting new people on board. It's a big promotion and communication effort and getting to know people. I think we'll be helped by the fact that classics is a field that is small enough that I know people I went to graduate school with and places I taught. Between all of us we probably have our own network and there are places that have been wanting in and that haven't been able to get in because of ACS so now we can tell those places “C'mon. We're ready for you now.”

HH: There will be plenty of takers.

DT: So the future is looking viable for this consortium?

HH: Oh yeah.

DT: I guess that was the big question even three years ago.

RD: Right. I think the question was three years ago because we had a Mellon grant and now this has been taken as a program of NITLE and I'm the dedicated staff person—I mean that's all I'm doing now—I've been managing several other programs as well and I'm a classics Ph.D. and it's kind of nice to come back to what I'm actually trained for. The program is looking great now and NITLE is a tremendous thing.

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