

# A Classics take on modern research

Undergraduate learning in Classics is not all about sitting at the back of the lecture hall, passively taking notes, nor does it necessarily come to an end when the summer term's exams are over.

The Department of Classics is keen to engage its students as active participants in their university education, and to fertilise teaching with its academic research: we prefer to see our students as junior members of our academic department rather than just customers rushing through an educational system that is of little relevance to their learning experience. The Department has a strong record in providing extra opportunities for its undergraduates, and this summer was no exception. Undergraduates across the department have been involved over the summer in research projects, curriculum design, museum work, and conferences.

## In-house research

The Department was particularly delighted to welcome no fewer than four Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme (UROP) undergraduate research students this summer, working with members of academic staff on research projects. Each paid placement lasted for six weeks, and second-year undergraduate students worked on diverse pro-

jects – on part of the Ure Museum's outstanding Greek ceramics collection, on research into Latin Sociolinguistics ('how to be cool in Latin'), on important work on ancient nutrition in the unpublished archives of Reading ancient historian Professor K.D. White, and on using Dr Matthew Nicholls' digital model of ancient Rome to examine the lighting conditions in Rome's theatres at particular times of day and year.

The department has a long history of engagement with the UROP scheme and was delighted by this year's record haul. UROP student Ed Howkins said: 'Reading is pretty unique in the opportunities that it gives to undergraduate students to work on research projects alongside academics; it's something my friends at other universities are jealous of!'

## Communicating research away from Reading

We were also delighted that two of our students went off to the British Conference

on Undergraduate Research at Preston, seeing their papers on changing portrayals of Medusa and on the Catilinarian conspiracy published in the new journal *Revolution*. Moreover, Professor Peter Kruschwitz managed to take Ms Alicia Cleary-Venables, a 2011 graduate and 2010 UROP student, to a conference on Roman drama in Bochum, Germany, where they presented their findings of their project 'How to apologise in Latin' (to be published in due course).

## Volunteering

Beyond student research, the Department has also encouraged students to volunteer in its Ure Museum, building up experience that can help when applying for jobs, and University Teaching Fellow Dr Matthew Nicholls has been employing graduate students from across the University in his digital projects; he has just received substantial funding for a new project, to create a virtual model of the nearby Roman town of Silchester, which will include undergraduates at the planning, design and implementation stages.

## Enquiry-based learning and student engagement

Undergraduates Gemma Allen and Philip Smither are participating in a University-wide project on student involvement in curriculum planning, and the Department has been making use of enquiry-based learning, from its large Part 1 modules in ancient Athens and Rome through to its more specialised later-years modules on subjects such as the use and abuse of alcohol in antiquity. Investment has been made in the Department's undergraduate resources room, which provides study space and a core library of reference works, and a new undergraduate Classics society set up through the modern medium of Facebook.

All in all, the Classics Department has been active in seeking new ways to teach an ancient subject, and was thoroughly delighted to see this recognised with a 100% score for student satisfaction in the 2011 National Student Survey. We aim to live up to this high standard in the future.

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