

# Career View

Issue No 24 • September 2002

## Classics

### Why study Classics?

Because echoes from the ancient civilisations of Greece, Rome, and other Mediterranean cultures remain deeply embedded in our modern consciousness and every day, one way or another, we live in the thick of their cultural legacy which underpins our government and legal systems. It informs the way we think and organise our knowledge about ourselves and the world. It reaches into the artistic and technological achievements we take such delight in. The classical past is not dead, it lives and breathes and walks with us all the time. To understand this is to have an advantage in the modern world.

The Greek and Roman civilisations grappled, at least in principle, with many of the issues that confront us today. Their solutions, for better or worse, provide reference points around which contemporary concerns, such as globalisation and free trade, can be discussed. The study of Classics is both relevant and resonant. Classical culture provides advertisers with a universally understood image that signals quality and exclusiveness. Celebrity, which seems such a modern phenomenon, is simply a carry-over from the hero cults that first found expression in the myths and legends of the ancient Greeks. And for those disenchanted with the commercial culture that pervades modern life, the classical world provides an alternative social vista.

### What skills do Classics graduates have?

Classics graduates know how to think. In an ever-shifting job market, the ability to think in abstract terms is not only one of the most desirable transferable skills, it is also one of the most reliable predictors of success on the job. A trained mind can be applied to any situation.

The skills of a mind trained in the classical tradition include:

- Strategic and tactical thinking - the ability to anticipate likely outcomes from hypothetical situations.
- Systematic analysis - the ability to work methodically through information separating what is relevant from what is not.
- Critical judgement - the ability to prioritise information, which leads to effective decision-making.
- Political awareness - an understanding of how power differentials between groups and individuals are used to achieve desired outcomes.
- The ability to construct a logical argument.
- The ability to identify cause and effect.
- The ability to spot the difference between rhetoric and substance.
- The ability to discriminate between events and the personalities of people who influence those events.
- Broadened perspectives from comparing other civilisations with our own.

*Topical coverage of career related issues brought to you by Victoria University Career Development and Employment.*

*Areas covered include how degrees and courses relate to employment opportunities, to life/work planning, graduate destination information and current issues or material relevant to the employment scene.*

*Your comments and suggestions always welcomed.*

- An appreciation of superlative literature and art which has had a dynamic influence on the western world.
- With Latin or Greek, an understanding of the etymological roots of English and other modern languages. This typically results in enhanced confidence with verbal and written communication and an enriched vocabulary. Understanding the grammatical structures that underpin these older languages can help people express complex ideas in modern English with greater clarity and finer shades of meaning.

Classics graduates also possess a range of other generic skills including:

- **Research and information gathering skills.** Knowing how to find and use information is essential in a 'knowledge economy.'
- **Factual knowledge.** In addition to positions where factual historical or linguistic knowledge is required, being able to retain and use factual information allows people to communicate with authority and conviction.
- **Decision making skills.** Classics subjects demand a disciplined and methodological approach and students are required to identify and resolve issues.
- **Confidence in exploring different points of view.** Employers typically value people who can come up with new insights or a different approach to work tasks and problems, particularly in team situations.
- **An adaptable and flexible approach** to problem solving. The study of Classics encourages students to explore different interpretations and construct new solutions to theoretical questions.
- **Experience in presenting ideas** and



information to groups - including receiving feedback in an open and constructive manner.

- **A results oriented approach** to tasks. Typically developed through the process of tertiary study.
- **Attention to detail.** People who pick up on details can prevent small problems from growing into big disasters. Employers do not like big disasters.

### *Where do Classics graduates work?*

According to recent graduate destination surveys, Classics graduates were employed in a variety of jobs which included, but were not limited to, event co-ordinator, conference organiser, bank officer, international banking consultant, research assistant, library assistant, records manager, book buyer, community support worker, employment officer, student liaison officer, and university tutor.

The Classics Department notes that their graduates work in radio, marketing, travel, museums, archaeology, and a range of Government Ministries, including Foreign Affairs and Trade, Health, Education, and The Treasury.

Certain sectors of the job market demand skills and knowledge that Classics graduates are particularly able to demonstrate. Although many job vacancies only refer to "a tertiary qualification," it is important to note that in some job areas additional courses of study, qualifications or practical experience may be required. Classics students might consider a second major subject when planning their degree.

### **Government and Legal:**

- To the extent that modern legislative and judicial systems are based on Greek and Roman models, Classics graduates are equipped with a conceptual map of how these institutions work and the processes and procedures that drive them.
- The formulation of policy demands high levels of abstract reasoning and the ability to follow hypothetical sequences of cause and



effect. Classics graduates have analysed action and consequence over time and in the context of highly complex social systems and organisational structures.

- Policy advice or analysis involves a combination of strategic and operational thinking skills. A typical job description statement might read “developing options to resolve policy and operational issues and prepare proposals and advice based on sound analysis and problem solving.”
- Government agencies that emphasise the provision of policy advice include the Department of Internal Affairs, Department of Labour, The Treasury, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Ministry of Social Development, and the State Services Commission.
- The Parliamentary Service, Ministerial Services, and The Office of the Clerk are agencies that provide advice and assistance to Parliament, Members of Parliament and Ministers. Excellent written and oral communication skills, problem solving and analytical abilities are required and typically possessed by Classics graduates. An appreciation of tikanga Maori could be desirable.
- Government organisations that are directly involved with historical matters include Archives New Zealand, The Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage. Classics students are advised to consider a double

major with History. A Masters degree is preferred and possibly a qualification in Museum Studies.

- Local Authorities are required to draw up strategic plans and set policy directions. Advisers work with their Council and its various committees and community organisations on procedures, processes, and the application of statutory regulations. High levels of verbal comprehension and reasoning are required.
- The practice of law has a traditional affiliation with classical studies and many basic legal concepts are still expressed in Latin phrases. The adversarial nature of the judicial system demands high levels of argument and counter-argument, and legal documents must be precisely worded in order to avoid ambiguity. The intellectual training that Classics students undergo is compatible with these requirements.
- Job titles include: researcher, Hansard reporter, librarian, speechwriter, policy analyst, policy adviser, parliamentary officer, lawyer, solicitor, administration officer, committee adviser, mediator.

### **Education:**

- Classical Studies is taught in many secondary schools (one of the fastest growing subjects at 6th and 7th form), and most universities.
- Latin is taught as an independent subject at some secondary schools.
- A PhD plus published research is required for university lecturing.
- Teacher training plus more than one teaching subject are generally required for secondary teachers.
- ESOL teachers are employed in some secondary schools and by specialised language schools. Knowledge of Latin and Greek can support the grammatical basis of ESOL training and teaching.
- Community education classes can provide more informal teaching opportunities.
- Educational travel is a developing area. Guided tours around the ancient world are popular, and sometimes field trips to

classical sites are incorporated into university studies.

- Large tertiary institutions are complex organisations with a range of administrative positions that demand high levels of conceptual thinking.
- Job titles include: university tutor/lecturer, secondary school teacher, tour guide, community education teacher, ESOL teacher, academic director, administration assistant.

**Research:**

- Many organisations carry out research of one sort or another, including universities, government departments, local authorities, libraries, museums, art galleries, market research companies, law firms, management consultants, and radio and television production companies.
- Classics graduates will have completed a range of independent research projects.
- Knowledge of different research methodologies and information systems, particularly the Internet, is necessary. In some cases knowledge of quantitative research methods and statistical techniques may be required.
- Where research is related to policy development roles, an understanding of research and evaluation concepts as they apply to a policy environment is necessary.
- Job titles include: research assistant, research analyst, art/museum curator, archivist, librarian, television researcher, qualitative market researcher, archaeologist, historian.

**Management and Business Organisations:**

- Core management skills include: strategic planning, the effective use of resources (including staff), making the right decision at the right time, and sorting out what to do in a crisis. Classics graduates understand strategy and the value of making a tactical decision. They also understand the effect of individual personality and character on the play of events.
- Business organisations such as banks, insurance companies, retail chains and

franchise operations require good decision makers, problem solvers and people with strong planning and organisational skills. Management opportunities usually depend on appropriate experience and performance.

- Most universities run graduate recruitment programmes whose participants include large companies recruiting graduates for management training. Check with Careers staff for more details.
- Job titles include: management trainee, projects manager, human resources adviser, employee relations manager, management consultant, operations manager, credit co-ordinator, administrator, bank officer, strategic analyst.

**Arts, Culture and Design:**

- Modern theatrical, artistic, literary and architectural forms are saturated with references to classical, especially Greek, prototypes. Those who understand these classical themes typically have a grounding in what has ‘worked’ creatively over two and a half thousand years.
- Employment situations vary widely, many people working in these fields are self-employed or working in organisations that rely on funding to stay financially viable. Some businesses can be very profitable, particularly in well-established professional areas such as architecture.
- Job titles include: arts administrator, playwright, set designer, film-maker, architect, art director, actor, stage manager, art conservator, writer, drama critic, choreographer, editor, garden designer.



### Media:

- All forms of media deal in some way with the communication of ideas, information and emotion. Classics graduates will understand the power of oratory and rhetoric, and the use of language as a fundamental tool of discussion, argument, negotiation and, ultimately, persuasion.
- Opportunities in this sector may depend on personal attributes of determination and persistence, together with relevant industry experience.
- High level written and oral communication skills are essential, and in an environment where image is everything, people who can pronounce Latin phrases and suffixes correctly tend to acquire intellectual credibility.
- Media organisations include advertising agencies, public relations firms, marketing companies, video, film and television production companies, newspaper, magazine and book publishers.
- Job titles include: journalist, accounts executive, editor, public relations consultant, marketing trainee, media organiser, copywriter.

### The Job Market

Classics graduates have rarity value, which is both an advantage and a disadvantage in the job market.

The disadvantage is that many employers have never had to think about the relevance of classical studies to the modern world and may have to be educated about its value. The advantage is that Classics graduates are likely to stand out from the crowd. In a competitive job market, the applicant that stands out in some positive way is a step closer to being the successful applicant. **Positive** is the big word.

Classics graduates who can articulate the value of their degree and the skills they have to offer, in more depth and with greater certainty than other graduates who merely assume their degree will speak for itself, will have an 'edge' to work with. The way to maximise this edge is to

develop an excellent job search strategy.

Successful job search is generally a two-part strategy, both parts of which work together.

- Engage in a question and answer dialogue with yourself and others. Why did you major in Classics? What did the subject offer you that was unique? In what ways do you now feel more confident and productive? What does the decision to major in Classics say about you as a person? Talk to other people about yourself and ask how they see you. Talk about job ideas and opportunities. Ask questions.
- Set up and manage a disciplined job search campaign. Plan for outcomes and organise your time. Collect job descriptions and look for key words and desirable skills. If you see a gap in your experience, work out a way to fill it. Contact people and follow up that contact. Keep records. Build bridges.

*Think like a Greek and act like a Roman.*

## Graduate Profiles

### Bridget Buxton

*PhD Student, University of California, Berkeley*

*Assistant Instructor, Scientific Diving Program*



When I started Victoria University in 1989, I had already made up my mind to study law. I say 'my mind' but the reality is that I was never encouraged to look outside the traditional fields that society associates with 'successful' people: law, medicine, business, computers, etc. Fortunately, a brief exposure to life and attitudes in several legal firms convinced me that I would not enjoy being a lawyer, and that a traditional professional career was not going to offer me the adventurous irresponsible lifestyle that I wanted. That was how I drifted into studying the subjects I actually enjoyed: classics, history, and archaeology.

In 1993 I obtained a BA in Classical Studies from VUW (with some time spent as an exchange student at UC Santa Barbara), followed by a BA Hons and MA (1995). The interdisciplinary nature of Classical Studies and the breadth of the subject meant that the material was always interesting and challenging. There were opportunities to learn ancient languages, hone research and writing skills, and gain teaching experience. The department was very supportive when I went to Crete to explore an obscure ancient cult for my MA thesis, my first experience of classical archaeology in the field. This strong general background has been very useful in my subsequent studies in the United States. If I could have done one thing differently, however, I would have spent more of my time at VUW working on languages. French and German are as essential as Greek and Latin in this field, and I've found it necessary at times to learn a bit of modern Greek, Italian, Hebrew, Turkish, even Arabic.

At the moment I'm finishing up a Ph.D. in Ancient History and Mediterranean Archaeology at the University of California, Berkeley, where I am also an assistant instructor for the Scientific Diving Program. Since going to Berkeley I've worked on numerous field expeditions in Greece, Israel, and Turkey, as well as underwater shipwreck excavations with INA and National Geographic. Currently I am the research director of a multi-year project exploring ancient shipwrecks and sunken cities off the coast of Anatolia, between stints as a lecturer for Royal Olympic Cruises in the Aegean and Adriatic, and contract work on archaeological and historical documentaries. I love all the writing, travel, discovery, and adventure that goes with my "job", but one of the best parts has been making new friends all over the world. There are amazing opportunities in this field, and rewards that money can't buy. I have no regrets for the office cubicles, suits, makeup, traffic, brain-dead TV, and 2-week holidays that I gave up to become an ancient historian and archaeologist.

What advice can I give to students contemplating Classics as a career? The academic job market is extremely tough, and if you are serious you are going to have to work very, very hard. However, that is probably true for anything worth having.

### **Sam Daish**

*Strategic Planning Manager, National Bank of New Zealand*



When people at work ask me about my degree and I tell them it is in Classical Studies they tend to laugh and ask "No really, what did you study?" Possibly strategic planning for a bank and Classics do not seem to be natural partners. It certainly took me a roundabout route to get into strategic planning. I started off teaching, then recruitment consulting, then human resources and then strategic planning. I think the only time I have ever used my classical knowledge in the bank is to explain what a triglyph was when someone wondered aloud what the sets of three stripes on our logo were. However the skills I learned in completing my Classics degree, particularly the Honours year, are invaluable in my role.

Classics teaches students not to take things at face value, but to review material critically and to question what people say, even if they are 'recognised' experts. In Classics nobody actually knows anything for certain, it is all just theory (until we can build a time machine and go back and take a look). So to do well in Classics requires building a likely theory using as much evidence as you can get your hands on. Taking that approach to business issues can be a powerful tool. In fact I've found it is a useful approach to most of life.

Of course I didn't realise that doing Classics would teach me anything like that when I first enrolled in it. I just wanted to learn more about

Alexander the Great, the wonderful Greek myths and Atlantis (I never did find out much about Atlantis actually). Doing something at university that you're interested in has the great advantage that you don't spend three or four years of your life being bored. I think that not being bored has a lot going for it. Particularly when it comes to learning. What you learn sinks in deeper and comes back more easily when you need it. It has greater positive impact than anything that has to be forced down your throat. The approaches you learn become second nature. The skills stay with you. I encounter rather a lot of people who trained in more 'work-related' fields such as accountancy, IT, or management who get a rather wistful look in their eyes and say "I wish I'd done something like that" when I talk about studying Classics.

A Classics degree is not going to make you immediately attractive to any and every employer. My experience as a recruitment consultant taught me that no degree is going to do that for you. Although I found it difficult at first, I believe that having done something you enjoy gives you a definite edge in the job market. Employers love someone whose eyes light up when they talk about what they've done. They like to be able to see what you can achieve when you put your mind to it. And they might just get a wistful look in their eye.

## **Mamari Stephens**

*Law Clerk, Russell McVeagh.*

Even when I was eight years old the study of ancient civilisations fascinated me, but this interest lay fairly latent until I did an OE and spent most of my time in Israel. It struck me, standing amidst the ruin of Megiddo looking at 5000 years of civilisation, that study had to be the next step in my life. From my first Classics lecture I was sold. While I have also taken Maori



Studies and completed a law degree, Classics was my first home and in many ways still is. Perhaps it was the fact that there were no questions about what I wanted to do with my life or how on earth Classical Studies would provide me with a meal ticket. Instead I met people who were curious and just wanted to learn stuff and discover ancient voices. The Classics Department was also able, despite its necessarily Eurocentric focus, to help me do comparative research looking at modern Maori society and some of the traits we may or may not share with ancient Greek and Roman culture and ways of being.

My time in Classics has taught me some of the best lessons I have ever had about communicating things in writing as well as in person. I learnt to read and understand my own writing and the writing of others. I had to learn to listen to others who knew more than I did about a topic. Most importantly I learned, or rather I reaffirmed, that it is okay to learn about things that fascinate you without having to justify yourself to anyone.

Funnily enough, having a Masters degree in Greek and Maori mythology helped me get my job as a law graduate at Russell McVeagh. Of course I needed my law degree as well, but the firm does look for people with other interests. Most employers want evidence of discipline, hard work, lateral thinking and effective communication. Classical Studies helped me develop all those things.

My advice would be to find a way to study what you love, whether that's Etruscan artwork or Jamaican reggae. You may have to combine fulfilling that love with doing other things to survive, but don't let mere survival keep you from what you love. And if you don't know what you love yet? Take a few risks. Try things out. That's how Classics worked for me.

### *Classics at Victoria*

In Classics we teach a full range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Classical Studies, Ancient Greek, and Latin. No knowledge of Greek or Latin is required for any of the undergraduate Classical Studies courses, although majoring students are strongly encouraged to take at least one of the half-year introductory language courses. Four basic 100-level Classical Studies courses are offered: Greek Literature, Myth and Society; Greek History, Government and Society; Greek Art; Roman History, Government and Society.

A range of more specialised courses are then offered at 200 and 300-level, covering Etruscan and Roman Art, Greek and Roman Drama, Greek Mythology, Roman Social History, Greek Society, Bronze Age Aegean Art and Archaeology, Greek and Roman Epic, and Myth and Storytelling. All of these courses usefully complement a variety of courses in other disciplines.

Both Greek and Latin can be taken from scratch with a major possible in three years of study, while students who have already studied Latin at school can also complete a major in three years, but with a different

portfolio of courses. The two 100-level Latin courses may also be taken during the Summer trimester.

Graduate study begins with a BA Honours Degree which students can complete over one or more years, taking four papers, one of which may be a specialised research essay. One or two papers may be substituted from other disciplines. One option in the Honours programme is the Greek Field Trip (5-6 weeks in November/December) which may also be taken at 300-level. MA and PhD degrees by thesis are available for students who have completed the Honours programme.



### *Special thanks to:*

The School of Art History, Classics and Religious Studies, in particular A/Prof Jenny Harper - Head of School; Prof Chris Dearden, A/Prof John Davidson and Treena Daly - Classics Department; Bridget Buxton, Sam Daish and Mamari Stephens and all those people who contributed to this publication.

*Career View* is published by Career Development and Employment  
Victoria University of Wellington, Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui  
PO Box 600, Wellington, Tel: 64-4-463 5390 or 64-4-463 5393, Fax: 64-4-463 5234  
[www.vuw.ac.nz/st\\_services/careers/](http://www.vuw.ac.nz/st_services/careers/)

September 2002

ISSN 1172-4315