

## **UCLA POSTBACC PROGRAM: Frequently Asked Questions (and some Answers)**

### **- Do I need to have studied Latin and Greek in order to be eligible for admission to the Classics program?**

Yes. In order even to be considered for admission, all students *must* have studied Latin and Greek, at least a year of each -- and this year must cover *all* of Latin and Greek grammar (i.e. completion of first-year/beginning textbook in Attic Greek or Classical/pre-Medieval Latin)

WHY: All postbacc students participate in our regularly scheduled undergraduate offerings. The program requires coursework *above* the elementary level. Our Latin and Greek sequence covers all of grammar in the first year (Latin 1-2-3, Greek 1-2-3), or in intensive summer study (Latin 16, Greek 16) and begins the second year with an intermediate course: Latin 20, Greek 20, both offered in fall only. If you find Latin or Greek 20 too difficult, you will need to repeat elementary language classes, and it will take you two years to earn the post-baccalaureate certificate.

### **- I've got three years of college Latin but no Greek. Can I apply?**

Yes; your admission would be contingent on your successful completion of intensive summer Greek in the summer before you arrive here (we'd need to see your final grade, which would need to be a letter grade of B+ or better). And vice versa (three years Greek, no Latin). This is not an unusual pattern among recent applicants to our postbacc program.

But bear in mind that summer intensive + a year of intermediate/advanced is not enough for most PhD programs in Classics, although sufficient for graduate study in some other fields (see below). WHY: In an intermediate/advanced year here, you would move from intermediate courses in fall/winter quarters (grammar review + selected texts) to author course(s) in spring and possibly in winter as well, for highly motivated students who earn an A or better in fall quarter and are approved to do a double course load in winter quarter. Even so, that still leaves you with a maximum of three author courses. See below on expectations in PhD programs.

### **- Why would I need a letter grade of B+ or better as opposed to a Pass?**

At UCLA, the level for "Pass" goes well below what would equip you for a successful performance in Latin/Greek 20. Moreover, bear in mind that your transcript will need to look good to future graduate programs. A grade of "Pass" will not look good, no matter how well you wind up doing in subsequent coursework at UCLA. Graduate programs are looking for students with an excellent grounding in basic language, and a "Pass" does not indicate that. They want an A or an A+; letter grades below that are detrimental; a B- in elementary language could remove you from competition. It will also mean that your year in the postbacc program will be very difficult; a low grade in Latin/Greek 16 is a very useful warning sign that you may need to rethink your future plans, if you realize that intensive study of ancient languages is not where your present strengths or future lie.

**- I've read a lot of Latin and Greek on my own. Doesn't that count?**

Unfortunately, no. What you need are courses, on an official transcript from an accredited institution, with satisfactory letter grades. Sometimes students read on a tutorial basis with a highly qualified person; that person can write us to attest to your skill level compared with other students s/he has taught. But this is still not as good as a regularly-scheduled, graded course, with frequent quizzes, exams, and assignments such as translating Greek and Latin into English.

WHY: Unfortunately, we can't just take your word or your tutor's word for it; in independent study, there is no one to point out mistakes or suggest something you might have missed. Even students who have been tutored are generally less well prepared for the pace at UCLA than those who have participated in classes that involved an official instructor and other students.

**- I did take Latin, but it was some years ago; I took Greek last year (not currently). Am I eligible?**

Maybe, but this poses problems. In our experience, you will be very frustrated in even intermediate coursework if you took elementary language -- or even quite a bit of language -- some time ago, but are not currently enrolled in language coursework. We find that any lapse in study leads to significant loss in skill. Students with gaps in their training, if admitted, are generally admitted only on the condition that they commit to some kind of formal review work.

And all admitted students will be urged in the strongest terms to review languages rigorously the summer before starting the program. Language courses at UCLA are quite demanding, and our quarter system intensifies the pace considerably; if what you want is to advance to graduate work, the last thing you want on your record is a low grade in an undergraduate course. We want all students who arrive here in the fall to be ready to meet a high standard. *If you are reading this with considerable lead time before applying to UCLA, and have a lapse in your language training, resume language study now!*

**- My main interest is in Art History/ Philosophy/ History ... Will I be able to pursue those interests at UCLA, and will the postbacc seminar help me with my applications?**

Yes, but ... As you can see from the certificate requirements, this program is mainly designed to improve students' languages, and all students in the Classics program are expected to take Latin and Greek every quarter, sometimes more than one course in one or both. (Students generally take three or four courses per quarter.) Many students are able to take courses in related departments; many use their extra course slot to take an elementary modern language (French, German, Italian), which are prerequisites for admission to and/or required for MA and PhD degrees in many graduate programs in History as well as in Classics.

The required postbacc seminar, given every fall, is aimed at coaching students through the application process for MA and PhD programs in Classics, and at providing students with basic skills that many Classics students need but lack (e.g., ability to scan verse; rhetorical analysis; how to read an apparatus criticus; familiarity with research tools in the field). We usually have

multiple students interested in applying to programs in History, and provide some preparation specifically for graduate work in History, where these programs are located in History Departments (most of the Archaeology programs in which we place students are located in Classics departments). Department faculty can often provide counseling on placement in Art History and Philosophy. We usually also have a visit from an experienced secondary-school Latin teacher, for those interested in a satisfying career, more accessible and affordable with fewer years of training.

**- My reason for enrolling in the UCLA Post-Baccalaureate Program is that I want to apply to top Classics PhD programs in the US and Canada; I would then be writing applications during my first quarter in the program. Is that a workable plan?**

Not always. *If you already* have three years of one language and two of the other, then, yes, that's not unreasonable. But the years of language study specified on grad program websites are *minimum amounts*. In fact, successful candidates at highly-competitive programs usually have a great deal more language than the minimum specified, along with at least one modern language.

If you have only two years on entrance at UCLA (elementary plus one year of intermediate/advanced), please realize that you may be applying to programs before your fall grades from UCLA, as many grad apps are due between December 1 and February 1. You would be able to say only what you were *planning* to take in winter and spring quarters; you would have to get letters from your current Latin/Greek professors attesting to your advanced reading ability. Students who do exceptionally well in advanced undergraduate work in the fall quarter are sometimes invited to enroll in graduate seminars in winter or spring quarter, an excellent start on grad-level performance.

Please look at the pre-requisites for some of the competitive MA programs that often place students into top PhD programs; you'll see that *they* often ask for 3-2 as a basic requirement for entry.

Again, candidates successful in applying to the most competitive PhD programs in Classics (Classical Philology degree) have often:

- done 4+ years of each language, sometimes 8+ of Latin;
- written an honors thesis of 30+ pages, with professional-level bibliography;
- acquired one or more modern languages;
- taught Latin for a year or so;
- already taken graduate-level courses.

Why two years of language isn't enough of a basis on which to apply to top-ranked PhD programs, or, indeed, to most PhD programs: First-year students at places like UCLA are required to take graduate seminars and surveys that presuppose a very extensive background in reading classical texts. In survey, for example, the amount of reading assigned is 600-1000 lines of verse *per week*. If your previous experience is entirely in courses where you read 100 lines of verse per week, and if you have no familiarity with most of the authors on the reading list, you'd be lost. In that case, your best option is to improve your skills in a postbacc program, then to try for the best MA program for your level, and to move from there into a PhD program.

Exceptions: PhD programs in some allied departments, like History and Art History, may indeed only require two years of prior language work, or only one ancient language. The question then is, what else do they require? The answer to that often is, quite a bit, and often quite complex (such minor or modern fields beyond Classics); you'll need to look at individual websites. Our program focuses mainly on language, while offering plenty of courses in ancient fields.

**- So can I stay in the program a second year?**

Yes; about a third of the students who start each fall stay for a second year, for one reason or another. You can stay on even if you have done all the work to earn the certificate in the first year; you just postpone taking the certificate.

Typical reasons for staying for a second year:

- did not complete the certificate in first year, due to language skill level
- arrived with one language at intermediate level although the other was very advanced
- arrived with both languages at intermediate level
- getting languages and research skills up to speed
- developing more advanced research and writing skills, for a successful writing sample

**- What kind of letters of recommendation do I need for the UCLA postbacc program?**

Your letters should testify to your ability to translate Latin and Greek accurately, to your experience and skill in research and writing about language and culture, and to your potential for working well in a group of scholars.

**- Do I need to include a writing sample?**

Not necessarily, but it doesn't hurt, for as soon as the quarter begins, you will need a research project ready for developing in the postbacc seminar. If you do not send a writing sample, please note that we are judging your writing skill from your personal statement, on which see below.

**- What should I say in my personal statement?**

Naturally we want to hear about what you have read and what you want to go on to do. The main point is how you say it. All the advanced-level language courses we have require substantial writing; we do not have the facilities to teach basic writing skills. If your personal statement or writing sample shows that you have basic problems, that will disqualify you.

The personal statement is also a dry run for the grad app statements you will soon be writing. Please take it very seriously; allow yourself time to do a good job, then go back and check what you've done.

What to say: just tell us about what you've studied, and lay out specifically what your goals are for your time at UCLA, as best you can, and your future goals (graduate programs). From our website, try to get a sense of who teaches what in the department, and of how UCLA's strengths match your needs.

**- What else can I usefully do to prepare?**

Graduate school in Classics is pre-professional work; students are training not only to study ancient texts, but to write about them as part of a community of scholars. A good application is one that shows a student has engaged with work in the field -- has read scholarship that appeals to the applicant intellectually, or has a favorite book or scholar. Ask your professors to make you up a reading list. If you are interested, for example, in ancient sexuality, but have not yet read any scholarship on the subject, the time to start reading is immediately, since you will never carry conviction in an application if you are only vaguely familiar with the state of the question.

**- Do I need to present GRE scores with my application?**

Most graduate programs in Classics and other fields have now dropped this requirement for admission, and GREs are certainly not required for admission to our postbacc program. You MAY need to take them for certain graduate programs, or to receive financial aid for them, so look for this requirement as you explore possible programs.

**- Does the program offer financial aid?**

Since 2022, the department is delighted to offer (funds permitting) a tuition scholarship supported by the Joan Palevsky Chair of Classics, available to candidates who advance the department's commitment to diversity, including members of groups that have been historically and are presently underrepresented in the academy. All other aspects of tuition and finances are handled by the University Extension (UNEX); look on the program description pages of their website for contact information. They do offer loans to full-time enrolled students in certificate programs, and a few scholarships are available.

**- Does the program offer health care?**

We regret that UNEX students are not eligible for health insurance, coverage or care through the University Health Center. Moreover, international students are *required* to show proof of health care, and UNEX provides a recommendation for plans; we advise looking further for more comprehensive care (e.g. Covered California), if you are no longer covered by family health plans.