

Veni, Vidi, Vici Latin

Illinois is one of only 14 colleges or universities that prepare Latin teachers, according to U.S. News & World Report's 2008 "America's Best Colleges" issue. The other institutions:

- Brigham Young University at Provo, Utah
- Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.
- D'Youville College, Buffalo, N.Y.
- Duquesne University, Pittsburgh
- Furman University, Greenville, S.C.
- Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pa.
- Hope College, Holland, Mich.
- Lawrence University, Appleton, Wis.
- Marquette University, Milwaukee
- Miami University at Oxford, Ohio
- Monmouth College, Monmouth, Ill.
- SUNY Albany, Albany, N.Y.
- Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Mich.

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First Class

Latin: Very much alive – and thriving – at Illinois

By Andrea Lynn

U of I. students can enroll in any number of cutting-edge science degree programs – biomolecular or nuclear engineering, for example, information or earth systems – and also in Latin – yes, Latin – a dinosaur of a language that fell by the spoken-tongues' wayside centuries ago. But students *do* study Latin at Illinois and they *do* learn to teach it too – not in the droves that the newest sciences are drawing, but in steady streams that started to flow when Latin was required for admission to the young campus in 1894.

To be sure, the number of Latin majors and graduate students is less than *magnus*, but it has steadily increased over the past five years. Moreover, one would be hard pressed to find a group of students more dedicated to – even passionate about – their field.

What is the appeal? Why are students drawn to the ancient language?

According to Ariana Traill, one of their professors, students are "fascinated by the legacy of the Romans – Roman history, Roman art, Roman literature – and they fall in love with the Latin language. It's such an enormous part of our western cultural heritage, not to mention our own language. It seems perfectly natural to want to learn more!"

Traill, whose research interests include Greek and Roman comedy, knows well the signs of a lifelong attraction to Latin and the classics.

"I'm the child of a historian of ancient Greece, so I've been learning about classical antiquity since I first started playing with Greek alphabet blocks," Traill said.

One of the practical reasons today's young men and women study Latin at Illinois is because Illinois is one of the few colleges and universities in the U.S. that offers a Latin program that includes teacher training; it offers a B.A. and a B.A.T (bachelor's degree in teaching Latin), an M.A. and an M.A.T (master's degree in teaching Latin), an Illinois teaching certificate and a doctorate. In its 2008 "America's Best Colleges" issue, U.S. News & World Report cited only 14 institutions of higher education that offered Latin teacher education.

What is perhaps even more surprising is that teachers of Latin are highly sought.

"Not only is it a rewarding field, but it's also a highly employable one," Traill said. "There is a national shortage of teachers of Latin right now. Many positions are going unfilled after retirements because there are no qualified replacements, and programs that would like to expand cannot."

Nearly three years ago, Traill led a campaign to improve the Latin teacher education program by adding certification to the department's M.A. degree. The change was enacted in the fall of 2005, and proved to be a move that would increase the numbers of students in Latin. The push for certification began when "No Child Left Behind" was enacted, she said.

"In the past, Latin teachers were under less pressure to become certified because Latin has such a strong presence in private schools. Now, more candidates want the option of teaching in public schools, which must hire certified teachers."

Illinois' classics department, now experiencing growing enrollments, is planning on hiring faculty members with expertise in Latin literature in order to expand course offerings.

"We have learned a lot from modern languages about language acquisition and this is reflected in new approaches to teaching Latin," she said. "For example, people are doing much more with

oral Latin, incorporating writing into Latin teaching, and teaching Roman culture along with the language."

Still, there are things Traill would like to add to Illinois' program. For example, she would like her students to be able to study in Rome and also to participate in the annual conference of the American Classical League, at which many experienced teachers share what they have learned.

Even without some of the more exotic opportunities looming on the horizon, current U. of I. students are delighted with their programs of study.

Christine Pinheiro, a senior in classics from Champaign, said that Latin "definitely gives me an edge when it comes to applying to graduate programs in theology, and for gaining a deeper understanding of the history of the (Catholic) Church."

It also helped expand her vocabulary. Pinheiro is planning on teaching theology at a Catholic high school after she graduates in May of 2009. She may go on to study theology.

Pinheiro was a relative latecomer to Latin, starting in her sophomore year at Illinois.

"It's a lot of hard work," she conceded, "but it's great to be able to sit down with a passage and decipher it."

Pinheiro described the U. of I. Latin program as rigorous, but said it has given her "a solid grounding in both Latin and Greek," which she may need for her theology studies. The biggest surprise for her is how much the study of Latin has improved her English grammar.

"For example, I now know and understand the difference between 'who,' 'whom,' 'who's' and 'whose!'"

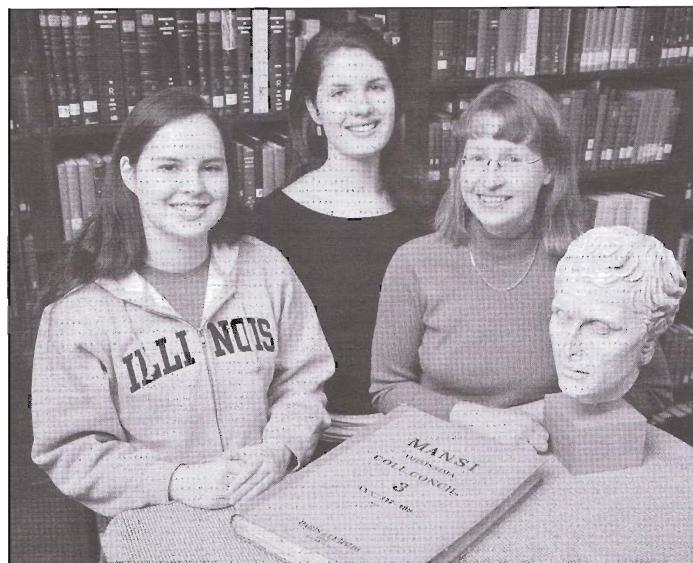
Giulia Mazza, a freshman majoring in psychology and minoring in Latin, says Latin holds many attractions for her, beginning with the fact that it's a part of her heritage.

"Being Italian means living side-by-side, literally and figuratively, with the glorious ruins of this great civilization," said Mazza, who was born in Milan, Italy, and lived there for seven years, as well as in Brazil for five years. She now lives in Lake Forest, Ill.

In addition, Latin courses have helped her "innumerable times, especially on standardized tests, where the meaning of obscure words could be drawn from the Latin root."

It even affects one's mental processes on a broader scale, she said, "leading one to think more logically and methodically through translation."

"Finally, Latin is just a beautiful language: from high-school Ovid and Catullus, where I first became enamored with it, to the equally fascinating medieval psalms I'm grappling with, Latin always expresses



Latin undergraduates from left, Christine Pinheiro and Giulia Mazza with classics professor Ariana Traill and a bust of the Greek comic playwright Menander in the Classics Library.

things with power and elegance.

"Some say Latin is a dead language, but I cannot imagine anything farther from the truth; it never ceases to surprise me. The cheerful bawdiness of certain Catullus poems made me blush; Virgil's tragic description of Troy's fall brought me near tears; currently I'm exploring medieval Latin and the fascinating transformations that shaped the language over a millennium of history."

Mazza described Illinois' Latin program as "fantastic."

"Coming in as a freshman, I could easily have been dealt with patronizingly or diffidently for my wish to pursue Latin at higher levels; instead, the professors I spoke to were incredibly friendly, helpful and professional."

Mazza said it's comforting knowing that, although many of her courses are 300-student lectures, "there's always a small, engaging, intimate Latin class waiting two times a week."

Kay Suleiman, a graduate student in Latin, is a strong advocate for that language. Recently she ran a little recruitment campaign to snag students into a semester of Latin. She had quite an argument.

"Why should you study Latin when there are so many other worthwhile subjects to study?" she asked prospective students in an e-mail.

"Quite simply, because you will get more long-term leverage from the study of Latin than from the study of any other subject in the U. of I. course catalog, no matter what your major is. Every hour you spend studying Latin is an investment in your future – if your future involves using the English language to express thoughts orally or in writing."

Suleiman, a mother of four who is writing a Latin curriculum for parents and their children, claims that learning Latin "increases your wonder of the beauty of English and causes you to make connections that will enchant you. It also will provide you with a foundation in your own language that will give you a deep and abiding satisfaction."

"In my opinion," she said, "every student in this university ought to have at least one semester of Latin. It is an absolutely basic subject for anyone who speaks English." ■

Photo by L. Brian Stauffer