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November 21, 2005

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Illinois Wesleyan University Adds Greek & Roman Studies Major

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – In a move that underscores commitment to the liberal arts, Illinois Wesleyan University has added a major in Greek and Roman Studies, traditionally known as classical studies.

Professor Nancy Sultan, who directs the University's Greek and Roman Studies program, considers classical studies to be "the hub of the wheel of the humanities" and a critical foundation for a liberal arts education. She notes Greek and Roman Studies provide a well-rounded background for those who pursue further study or careers in law, medicine, education, public service, journalism, theology, and more.

Since Sultan began teaching Greek and Roman Studies at IWU in 1993, the program has been steadily developed so that no additional courses or faculty are now needed in order to offer the major. A minor was previously available, and students were able to make special arrangements for a major with assistance from faculty advisers in selecting coursework. Following approval by the University's Curriculum Council and faculty as a whole, the major is now available as an established plan of study.

"I'm thrilled," Sultan said, noting that the best liberal arts institutions offer classical studies. "Classics is the oldest of the liberal arts disciplines and remains one of the most valuable. Students are not just learning about the past, they're learning about the here and now. Much of what is going on, including terrorism, was already described by Herodotus and Thucydides in the fifth century B.C. Classics is humanist study at its core: Why do empires rise and fall? Why do people murder and (seek) revenge? What is justice? Every idea that we have, from law and politics to the arts, has been profoundly influenced by Greece and Rome, and it is very important to understand the power of that influence."

While the traditional canon of Greek and Roman Studies for a time fell out of favor as multicultural studies gained long-needed recognition, Sultan points out that classical studies today incorporates multicultural perspectives. This includes examination of the early non-Western cultures that influenced Greece and Rome, and how ideas about slavery, ethnicity and race came into Western culture from the Greeks and Romans. Today the discipline examines not only the positive legacy of Greece and Rome, but the negative as well.

Sultan also notes practical benefits to studying the Greek and Latin languages, from which 60 percent of all English words are derived, and which are the basis of 90 percent of the technical terminology in law and medicine. The study of Latin and Greek not only improves the students' English grammar and vocabulary, it also increases the ability to understand other "daughter" languages such as Spanish, Italian and French.

In addition to language studies, courses are offered in ancient art, archaeology, literature, history, religion, political science, and philosophy. Jason Moralee, assistant professor of history, and April DeConick, associate professor and chair of religion, contribute core courses in ancient history and religion, respectively.



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