

The Value of Latin: Some Perspectives

The benefits of studying Latin are numerous. Students not only learn a language whose rich literature had a significant influence upon the history of writing in various genres, but they also come face to face with an important world culture. Because the Roman Empire was a nation made up of many provinces populated by a complex, multicultural society, students can also make correlations to present day political and social situations and world events. This culture eventually impacted a large geographical area touching 4 continents, and its study helps students better understand some of our American institutions and government, discuss the long history of some socio-economic issues, and grasp certain aspects of the relationship between North and South America and Europe over the past 500 years. Two millennia of history and many traditions of the Christian church are also tied to Roman history and culture and especially to the use of the Latin language.

Education in most all subject areas is now based upon state and national goals, frameworks and standards. Learning the language of Latin has been shown to build students' verbal abilities as well as develop skills in critical thinking, problem solving, and analysis - all transferable life skills. The logical structure of the Latin makes one think about how language works. In addition, we still use the poetic and rhetorical devices of Greco-Roman origin in English writing and public speaking. Ancient Greek and Roman writers used styles of composition that later had significant influence upon the development of almost every genre of English language literature. Students are often asked to approach what they read analytically, with respect to style, word choice, tone, and historical context. Allusions to and borrowing from Greco-Roman myths and legends are also very common in current literature and film, and students learn how to recognize and understand these in context.

Over half of English vocabulary is derived from Latin and 90% of English words longer than 2 syllables are Latin-based. This is why a knowledge of Latin and Greek roots is part of upper elementary and middle grade content standards in most states and stressed within the Common Core and ESSA Standards. The extent of one's vocabulary directly affects communication skills, which have been shown to be the single most important factor to career success – no matter what job one chooses. And of course in medicine and the sciences, there are literally millions of words, terms and names that are based directly on Latin. And Latin still provides

common terminology for international communication. Many legal terms are Latin and our legal system has interesting connections to Roman law. Latin is also valuable, because it is an excellent base for learning other Romance languages, whose vocabularies are about 70-80% Latin.

Latin instruction has risen in some areas and fallen in others, often due to budget deficit cutbacks, but across the nation it is holding on. It is taught in public, public magnet, private, and home schools, even to the point that during the last decade some areas of the country have not been able to find enough teachers! Talented teachers use a wide variety of methods and approaches to attract and accommodate students, from oral usage and comprehensible input to podcasting and online media. These creative teaching strategies also help Latin students build their 21st Century Skills, skills that will benefit them their whole life, no matter what career they choose. Many Latin texts have been or are being updated and teachers often employ all the newest technologies.

Students may also choose to participate in local and regional activities, as well. Some schools host local Latin certamen quiz-bowl contests. There are also a number of national and international contests for Latin students. Over 155,000 students in the US and 20 other countries took one of the international contests last year. More than 50,000 students are active in their local Latin clubs at junior and senior high schools. Students can choose to attend regional, state and national events, if they wish.

For those who are college-bound, Author W. H. Jarold, who wrote for the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics Washington DC. Educational Resources Information Center, adds "In addition, data from the Admission Testing Program of the College Board show a definite positive correlation between Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores and the study of [world] languages. In one recent test group, for example, students who.....had taken only one year of a [world] language had slightly higher scores in reading and math, whereas students with two years of [world] language showed more dramatic increases. Each additional year of language study brought a further rise in scores."

Jarold also stated that a "second language is now becoming a vital part of the basic preparation for an increasing number of careers. Even in those cases where the knowledge of a second language does not help graduates obtain a first job, many report that their [world] language skills often enhance their mobility and improve their chances for promotion.....they also have further tangible advantages in the job

market. In a recent study that sought to ascertain which college courses had been most valuable for people who were employed in the business world, graduates pointed not only to career-oriented courses such as business management, but also to people-oriented subjects like psychology, and to classes that had helped them to develop communication skills. World language students, whose courses focus heavily on this aspect of learning, often possess outstanding communication skills, both written and oral. Furthermore, recent trends in the job marketplace indicate a revived recognition of the value of liberal arts training in general in an employee's career preparation."

Up until 2017, the College Board published data that showed Latin in relation to other subject areas college-bound students have pursued. It also calculates correlations between SAT scores and the length of study of certain subjects, including English, math, biological sciences, physical sciences, and social studies and found noticeable benefits. Although these studies showed very strong correlations, it must be noted that they were not set up to prove causation. However, year after year, Latin students ranked at the top in Verbal/Critical Reading and often in Writing, as well, in relation to other upper level college-bound students taking other world languages or doing advanced studies in other academic subjects.

On a higher level, results were also positively correlated on the GRE for college seniors testing for graduate school (last data:2012-2016). *Classical Studies/Latin majors scored high (in top six) on verbal sections out of all of 300 major college fields of study listed.*

For these reasons, among others, students might consider the study of Latin, as well as Greek, as a solid choice for their language study in middle and high school.