

**KAREN FOLEY:** Welcome back to *The Student Hub Live*. In this next section of opening up classical studies, we take a look at classical studies at The Open University.

Now, classical studies are an integral part of studying the arts and humanities here at the university. And as well as providing a range of exciting opportunities to students across the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, there's also an array of open access study materials and resources, which are free for anybody to use. And in this session, we're going to tell you a little bit more about what's on offer.

And I'm joined by Jo Paul and James Robison, who are going to fill us in. So Jo, the OU is celebrating its 50th anniversary. 50th anniversary in 2019. So with that in mind, can you tell us a little bit about the history of Classical Studies at The Open University.

**JO PAUL:** Yeah. Well, we've been here pretty much since the beginning of the university. So not always as the big department that we are today. But right from the very beginning of our kind of arts foundation or modules. So back in the early '70s we had classical studies material in a module looking at, for example, Socrates and Aristophanes. So some of the authors that people have been hearing about already today.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Brilliant. And James, what kind of opportunities does the OU offer to study the classical world?

**JAMES ROBISON:** Well, we have a whole range of modules now, teaching all aspects of the classical world, from its history, politics, literature, language, religion. With our undergraduate modules at the moment, we have 1,300 students signed up to study modules in the classics. As part of students' first year studies as well, they do general art studies. And we have 6,500 students there. And they all study a little bit of classical studies as well there, which is fantastic for us.

And we have a master's programme too.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Brilliant.

**JAMES ROBISON:** So we have a part time master's taught over two years. And we have 200 students registered on that. So it's a big operation.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Excellent. So in addition to the undergraduate and postgraduate offering, we wanted to talk about some of the free resources that anybody can access.

**JO PAUL:** Yeah. Absolutely. Yes. So one of the really important things at The Open University, a bit like we're doing today with this event, is finding ways of kind of opening up the material that we offer, and making it as accessible as possible to a wide audience.

So we offer a huge range of resources, mainly via a particular platform that The Open University runs called OpenLearn, as well as via our department website.

**KAREN FOLEY:** So I can see the OpenLearn site here. "Dive in and start learning." You can just type in your search terms, can't you, and find out more?

**JO PAUL:** Yeah. Absolutely. There is a huge amount of stuff on there.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And we've got those on the Student Hub Live website as well. So we can take a look at that.

Now, there are also some Greek and Latin resources. And James, I wonder if you can fill us in. These are on the OpenLearn website as well. Aren't they?

**JAMES ROBISON:** These are on our departmental websites, in fact. Well, there are some OpenLearn ones. But the ones that we're going to show you today are on our departmental website.

So there's a whole range of stuff, covering all different aspects of Greek and Latin. But the ones we want to concentrate on now are the ones which are designed for complete beginners. As you said, they're open access. They're free. So anyone can dive in and have a look at these straight away.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And so why is it important to start to get to grips with Greek and Latin then before you study?

**JAMES ROBISON:** Well, I think, before you study the languages, I think it's useful just to have a bit of preparation time. There's quite a lot of challenges when you start learning the language, especially with Greek, because it's a new alphabet to learn. And so what we've wanted to do here is to allow students to gain a bit of confidence in their language study before they begin. And also really just to dip their toe in the water, to see whether language study is for them.

**KAREN FOLEY:** I'd like to take a look at these as somebody who dropped out of Latin, because I find it far too complex about 20 years ago when I was an undergraduate in New Zealand.

So can we have a look and see how we actually start teaching this? Because you've got some really fun, interactive ways of making this not quite as complicated as I remember when I was

younger.

**JAMES ROBISON:** Yeah, we have. So it's brought out the kind of creative nerd in me, these websites. They've been really fun to work on. So I think we have a few screenshots of what we do.

**KAREN FOLEY:** We do. Let's take a first look at the ancient Greek.

**JAMES ROBISON:** Yeah. So you'll see here at the bottom of the screen you've got the letters of the alphabet here. And if you click on one of the letters, then they come up, like with beta here. And they'll give you a few words in Greek, with their English equivalents as well.

And these tend to be words that you might be familiar with if you've studied the ancient world before. So this allows you to get to grips with the individual letters of the alphabet, and also to learn the sequence of them too.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Excellent. And you can have things like hear the sound and look at the basic vocab, and try to establish then connections, is it?

**JAMES ROBISON:** Yes. So if we look at the next screenshot, yeah. So this is what you go on to after you've looked at the basic letters.

So here the alphabet's down the left hand side. But on the right hand side there are words. Each of the words will feature the letter that's being discussed. And if you click on it, you will hear a lovely voice- being mine- which comes on and tells you how the word is pronounced.

And we try to choose words here that have connections with English words. So the first word is [NON-ENGLISH], I hear, which is like acoustics in English, for example.

So yeah. It allows students to get a sort of basic familiarity with the vocabulary, but also to see those connections, as you said, with the English language. So it doesn't look so hard after all.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And one of the fun things about learning online with The Open University is that in addition to things that could be in print format like this, there are also some really nice interactives. And I think you've got a nice drag and drop activity to show us as well.

**JAMES ROBISON:** Yeah. Right. So again, next screen up. So what we haven't wanted to do is to make students type Greek, because they wouldn't have the keyboard to do that. So what we've done here is some basic words again, words which will be familiar to people.

So this word is drama, for example, a nice word that comes straight from the Greek. And when you're using this website, you just drag and drop the letters. If you get it wrong, then it will tell you, you've got it wrong. But it will give you a hint as to how to get it right. And after a few attempts, if you've messed up, it will tell you what the right answer is, and you can move on to another one.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And then the last slide you wanted to show us about Greek language is about the animations.

**JAMES ROBISON:** Yeah. So again, this is a really fun part of this. Greek works differently from English in that it's not word order that determines meaning. It's the endings of the words. So what we allow is students to mess around with the word endings. And depending on what ending you've got on what word, you can either have a man chasing a crocodile, like you've got here, or a crocodile chasing a man. And on the real version, this is all animated. Yeah.

**KAREN FOLEY:** OK. Well, that sounds great. Difficult when you've got a different alphabet to learn as well. So how does it work with Latin? I mean, that surely must be easier.

**JAMES ROBISON:** Well, yeah. I would hope so. So we have a similar site that we developed for Latin. But the great thing about that, as you say, the Latin alphabet is very similar to the English alphabet. You can get to know how to pronounce Latin in a very short time, as you'll see from our slides as well.

And so we've managed to sort of push students a little bit further using this site. So here you'll see the same idea that we had before, where you have the Latin alphabet, and you have words which feature those letters. Again, lots of words with connections from Latin to English.

So the first one, amicus, friend, like amicable in English. What else have we got here there? Mater, meaning mother, like maternal in English.

So again, it should demonstrate to people that Latin isn't so difficult after all. And there's no reason to drop out from your undergraduate course.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Well, I had Greek drama to contend with, which, to be honest, inspired me a lot more at the time. But yes. No. It is good. And very useful, again, to establish those links, and to help with your etymology, just in everyday terms, in addition to obviously preparing you for classical studies.

But not only do you have those words. You also have some flashcards as well, which are good

for confidence building.

**JAMES ROBISON:** Yeah. That's right. So we introduce students to just 24 really basic words. And again, you have these connections with English words as well. So femina, meaning woman, like feminine, for example.

So this is a bit of fun. With these flashcards you can change the format of them. So you can take away the English word, or take away the Latin word if you want to test yourself on them as well. And what you do, in a pretty short period of time I would have hoped, is build up this small vocabulary of 24 words.

Again, showing you that it's all pretty straightforward. And then it also helps us with the later section of the site too.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Yeah. So I mean, the words are one thing. But then, of course, it's combining them into sentences, and making sense of them, which is a struggle.

**JAMES ROBISON:** Absolutely. So in the last section of the website we show you a few more things that you can do with these words. So using the vocabulary that you've just learned, we show you a few quirks of Latin. One of them, again, like Greek, is this business of the word ending, showing you what the word is doing in a sentence rather than the word order.

And rather than a man and a crocodile this time, we have a slave and an elephant. So depending on what you do, you can either have the slave chasing the elephant. And he rather beautifully drops down the hole. Or similarly, the elephant can chase the slave. And he less eloquently drops down the hole.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Sounds like fun. And also very clear cut, and simple in bit-sized chunks. So these are things that people can go and access and start to get to grips with, and eventually build up.

**JAMES ROBISON:** Yeah. That's the idea. One of the great things about this is what you're not doing is sitting in a class full of people who are all trying to learn their alphabet at the same time, and all trying to get to grips with these concepts. You can do it in your own time, in the privacy of your bedroom, in the supermarket queue, wherever, and just build up that gentle confidence.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Without one of those blackboard rubbers being thrown at you.

**JAMES ROBISON:** Absolutely.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Lovely. OK. So language is one thing, but content is another. And Jo, I wonder if you could tell us about Hadrian.

**JO PAUL:** Yeah. So if you have a look on our OpenLearn site, we've got some really brilliant interactive resources. And one of my favourites is an interactive game that we developed in relation to our level three module on the Roman Empire.

And because that module begins at one of the kind of furthest extents of the Roman Empire, looking at Hadrian's Wall, we decided to make this game focus on the Emperor Hadrian. So it's called, as I think you'll see in a minute, *Hadrian, the Roman Emperor*, all puns intended I think. And it's just a really brilliant, fun, and interactive way of learning about his reign basically.

So you begin by having to kind of create a little passport for Hadrian, which, yep, as you can see here, asks you a few questions sort of specifically about his physical appearance. And about his kind of identity, asking you about his nickname. And it doesn't matter if you get these things wrong, because you just find that it's a useful, as you say, little bit-sized way of building up little chunks of knowledge about his reign.

And once you've created your passport for Hadrian, you get to kind of follow him on his travels throughout the empire. So he kind of walks along. And as he goes along, you encounter different territories. So you follow him through Britain, through Germany, and beyond. And you get to answer questions about what he was up to, and collect little things, see how far he's travelled.

So yeah. It's a lot of fun, but just a really good way of building up a bit more knowledge about that particular bit of Roman history.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Brilliant. And a really fun way of learning as well. Isn't it?

**JO PAUL:** Really fun. Yeah.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Not just from books.

Aisha, how's everyone at home and at school?

**HJ:** We're doing really well. All the links that we've discussed I've put in the chat as well. And if there's anything that you want to come back to or we haven't posted, just email us [studenthub@open.ac.uk](mailto:studenthub@open.ac.uk), and we can send them to you, because a lot of people have been

asking for our resources.

But Susan Scott had a great question. She's looking to go from a 100 into classical studies. And she wanted to know if our guests think having a basic understanding of modern Greek will be a help or hindrance going into the courses?

**KAREN FOLEY:** You said modern Greek.

**JAMES ROBISON:** Yes. So we construct all of our non linguistic courses in such a way that you don't need to have a word of Greek or Latin to study them. And obviously, sometimes you have to introduce Greek or Latin terms, but we explain all of those. So it's certainly not something that you need to have.

In terms of modern Greek and ancient Greek, well, the connections are extraordinary. So about 70% of modern Greek vocabulary is essentially the same as ancient Greek vocabulary. And that's a 2,500 year gap. So that kind of proximity between ancient and modern languages is just extraordinary.

The one thing that's really changed is the pronunciation, however. And so if you're learning ancient Greek in the UK, it will sound like a very different language. But once you begin, you'll realise just how many words are the same or very closely the same as modern Greek.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Excellent. And on that note, Jo, I wonder if very briefly you can just give us an example of some of the undergraduate material that's available on OpenLearn.

**JO PAUL:** Yeah. So one of the things that OpenLearn is really good for is giving you little kind of insights into our undergraduate, and actually our postgraduate modules across all subject areas at the OU.

So all of the classical studies modules that we offer, if you're on OpenLearn, you get the chance to just sort of have a go at one of the units. So, for example, we've got a unit on introducing *Virgil's Aeneid*, which comes from our level two module on Latin language and literature. We've got similar ones for *The Iliad*.

And they're really good if you're already studying that material, perhaps at school. They're really useful resources for revision, perhaps, or giving you a bit more insight into it. Or if you're new to the subject, I think they also work really well as a kind of a launchpad for giving you a bit of an insight into what studying it would be like.

**KAREN FOLEY:** And, of course, we can't leave the topic of studying without talking about Homer and *Troy Story*.

**JAMES ROBISON:** Absolutely. So *Troy Story* is an animation which a colleague of mine commissioned a few years ago. So we have a new module this year called Exploring the Classical World, which is a revamp of a former module that we had.

And yes. As you say, you can't study the ancient Greeks without studying Homer, *The Iliad*, and the *Odyssey*. *The Iliad* is 15,000 lines long, however. And the *Odyssey* is 12,000 lines long. So quite big and daunting texts.

So what we've done for students to give them an introduction is to boil these down into two minute animations. And I think we're going to see a clip of *The Iliad* version, so *Troy Story* I right now.

**NARRATOR:** *The Iliad*. An epic tale of gods and heroes set in Troy over 3,000 years ago. At its heart, the story of a great warrior afflicted by terrible rages, Achilles. Son of the sea nymph, Thetis, an immortal named Peleus

The setting. The war began almost 10 years ago when Helen of Sparta was stolen away by the Trojan prince Paris.

**KAREN FOLEY:** Well, that's giving you a taste of things. There's also a fantastic website, Classics Confidential, that was started by some colleagues here at classical studies at The Open University that's got lots of videos, podcasts, and much, much more.

But you can find out more about those on the Student Hub Live website, and also on OpenLearn as well. So thank you very much James Robison and Jo Paul.

We're now going to take a little break. In the next 20 minutes we're going to show you some highlights from earlier classical studies focused Student Hub Live events at The Open University, and also some of the classical studies animations that are available on OpenLearn. And we'll also be finding out more about activities from the ACE project and the classical studies department here at The Open University. Join us for our next session in 20 minutes.

[MUSIC PLAYING]