

Damian Fleming  
Associate Professor  
English and Linguistics  
CELT Summer Instructional Development Grant Final Report

## **Living Latin at IPFW**

NOTE: As discussed with Gail Rathbun and the CELT Board at our Oct 13, 2016 meeting, my goals for this summer grant are to reconfigure my entire 4-semester Latin sequence. Changes implemented as a result of my Summer Instructional Grant will not be fully evident until I teach a first-semester Latin class with "blank slate" students using the methods and philosophy outlined below. These results will not be available until the end of Fall 2017. I have spent the Fall 2016 semester rolling out and testing these new instructional methods with a small class of 6 students with mixed previous Latin abilities; 2 students had virtually no previous experience; 2 students had at least two previous semesters of Latin instructions; 1 student had a single previous semester and 1 student was a homeschooled high schooler who had studied Latin on his own. The ultimate goal of the Summer Instructional Grant is to develop best methods for using Living Latin methodologies from the beginning with absolute beginners. Because of my initial mixed class, all comments below are necessarily preliminary.

### **Introduction and Background:**

I have been teaching Latin at IPFW since I first introduced the class here in 2009. Latin had never before been offered here. Up until last year my instructional method for Latin had been based on how I learned Latin myself and how Latin and other ancient languages are normally taught throughout the world: the "Grammar-Translation" method. Because Latin and other ancient languages are "dead" the primary goal in learning them has long been to be able to read ancient texts by ancient authors. After all, there are no native Latin speakers to converse with, so even pronouncing Latin has always been a secondary concern in Latin pedagogy. The Grammar-Translation method, as the name implies, involves the rote memorization of grammatical paradigms (Latin is a highly inflected languages; each verb has over 100 different forms) and grammatical rules then put into the service of mechanical translation of texts. This approach often makes language learning more like solving mathematical equations rather than human communication. This is actually one of the appealing facets of Latin learning for some students. This approach is near universal around the world for over 100 years.

An almost chance opportunity, however, introduced me to a radically simple "new" approach to teaching and learning Latin: Living Latin. Under this umbrella term I include a wide variety of strategies, but the root principle is the same: treat Latin as we treat every other language and employ our natural human capacity for language learning to develop fluency in the language. In my classroom, I have adapted to central tenets of this Living Latin approach: spoken Latin, comprehensible input, and extensive reading.

## **Rationale:**

This new approach is necessary because of deficiencies in the “Grammar-Translation” method of Latin language learning which I am aware of both as a teacher and student of Latin. My own brief experiences of using Living Latin and Comprehensible Input has already drastically improved my own abilities to read Latin. This may seem strange, but 18 years after first learning Latin, and 12 years into teaching Latin to others, a few months of a new approach has radically altered—all positively—my understanding of Latin. I seek to pass this benefit on to my own students. I currently have five years experience teaching Latin at IPFW. As the only full time instructor, I have set the standards I expect students to meet. These have generally been the ability to read and translate unadapted texts by Caesar, Cicero, and Vergil. I have assessed their skills by means of regular exams asking them to translate portions of extremely difficult Latin that they had prepared in advance at some point during the semester. We would work towards competence in this task by preparing and translating these texts during the semester. This approach—although long standard throughout the world of teaching classical languages—I have come to realize, has several serious drawbacks. Most importantly, this is easy to “fake” success in. A student with a rough knowledge of Latin can easily find published translations of many classical work we are reading and overly rely on them and thus never engage in the real mental work of translation. This approach could even be used to fake success in the whole course, by essentially memorizing translations of all the passages we prepared over the semesters. This raises a second major flaw of this approach: by focusing on the most difficult Latin texts, we necessarily can only read very little of texts in the target language. This is utterly counter to all that Second Language Acquisition scholarship teaches us about learning a language. At worst, students never fully understand what they are reading, and quickly forget what they have read. This is passive learning at its worst. Finally, among the lowlights of this approach, is that it is simply not engaging. We have moments of pleasure from small bits of the texts, but for the most part, the course is painful: all but the very best students want to hide from being called on, and the instructor quickly tires of having to “pull teeth,” or simply translates the Latin for the students, which is of minimal benefit.

On the contrary, Living Latin and Teaching with Comprehensible Input is amazingly simple in theory. Students should encounter a large amount of the target language in engaging texts at the appropriate level. Students read widely and broadly, which will lead to deeper learning, because their use of the language becomes a part of them. This emulates the way that children learn their first language. Additionally, I strive to maintain a Latin classroom: meaning we learn Latin and discuss Latin *in Latin*. Surprisingly, this approach to Latin teaching is still revolutionary and at the college level virtually unheard of. Although new Latin textbooks are published at a rate of more than one per year, I know of only a single book—*Lingua Latina per se illustrata* (“The Latin Language Revealed through Itself,” published by a Danish scholar in 1990) which is appropriate for this approach. My recent participation in the Paideia Institute’s Living Latin in New York City introduced me to a number of high school teachers who are currently using this approach in their classrooms as well as professors and graduate students from the University of Massachusetts, Boston, who are among the first to bring this approach to the college classroom. I

have spent the grant period learning from these teachers—many of whom have chronicled their experiences and advice online—as well as crafting college level materials for my classes.

### **Implementation of Living Latin**

Over the Summer Grant period I read extensively on the subject of comprehensible input and Living Latin in the classroom. I have joined and actively participate in a number of pedagogically focused online groups of Latin teachers primarily committed to Living Latin instruction. This online networking has been incredibly helpful; it's great to not have to reinvent the wheel. I have also taken advantage of a friend's offer to engage in Skype Latin reading and speaking sessions. I happen to have undertaken this course change at an opportune moment. This past May, at the International Congress of Medieval Studies (in Kalamazoo, MI; the largest gathering of medievalists in the world; I attend every year), two spoken-Latin organizations held their first ever conference sessions. This included a talk by Rev. Daniel B. Gallagher, the Latin Secretary of State for the Vatican and Prof. Diane Anderson, classics professor at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which is one of the only college-level programs in Living Latin. I was able to meet with these international authorities and brainstorm my new Latin undertaking. I have already become a sort of unofficial representative of this sort of Latin instruction among medievalists.

Over the summer, I settled on a textbook (the one and only Latin-only based textbook), and read the textbook in its entirety. I have been gradually adapting exercises which are available for this textbook, and continue to determine their usefulness for the classroom I hope to achieve.

I have developed and implemented a core repertoire of classroom vocabulary and expressions for day to day business in class. Gregory Stringer, a high school Latin teacher based in Massachusetts, has shared with me a variety of pre-reading exercises keyed to the textbook we use. I have found this a very helpful way to organize class meeting. Furthermore, I have had great success with the pedagogical method known as "Circling," which involves reading comprehensible texts, then orally asking the students intelligible questions of increasing or decreasing levels of complexity, carefully monitoring their responses for comprehension.

### **Implementation:**

- Performed a literature review of implications of SLA and CI for Latin Language pedagogy (reading list below)
- Organize course following all-Latin textbook, Hans Ørberg, *Lingua Latina per se illustrata*.
- Created new materials for every element of the class: daily assignments, worksheets, quizzes, exams
- Developed a repertoire of spoken Latin instructional materials
- Greatly improved my own spoken Latin abilities

## **Objective and Assessment:**

As noted above, proper assessment of these fundamental course changes will have to await until full implementation with new students. Nevertheless, I can present initial findings based on my students' performance in the first semester of Living Latin.

At the end of the Fall 2016:

- We have progressed almost halfway through *Lingua Latina*, and all students demonstrate reading and speaking comprehension of the book's content.
- We have used spoken Latin in class every day. All students demonstrate oral comprehension of simple Latin utterances, and are able to respond to a range of novel utterances.
- I designed a final exam which was entirely in Latin: all questions were in Latin and all answers were written by students in Latin. The final exam tested reading comprehension and breadth of vocabulary. Final exam scores ranged from 86-97%

## **Challenges:**

The current meeting schedule (50 mins, MWF) greatly hinders the probability of receiving enough comprehensible input in Latin. This is an endemic problem for all language classes, but it will be lessened when I teach a proper, 4-credit, 4-time a week course in the following Fall.

Some of my students were aware of this deficiency in our scheduling and sought opportunities to meet and speak and read more Latin outside of class time. We did so perhaps half a dozen times, but student schedules make such extra-curricular activities very difficult.

I initially wanted to provide as much comprehensible input as possible without overly stressing students about producing "output." However, it is difficult to assess students' progress and comprehension without artifacts. In the Fall semester, I did not give regular written homework until near the end of the semester. I have since begun to give regular written homework. I believe this will in some small measure begin to compensate for the lack of appropriate class room time. Additionally, even though attempting to generate such output early on in the language learning process runs counter to the Second Language Acquisition philosophy of much of my reading, it provides a structure for my students outside of class to engage with Latin reading.

*Lingua Latina* includes regular morphology quizzes which ask student to fill in missing inflectional ending from noun and verb forms. I initially thought these might be a productive exercise and assigned them./ I quickly learned, however, that such abstract grammatical analysis comes far easier to some students than others, and does not help either group comprehend Latin any easier. After discussing these types of assessment with other Latin teachers in my online networks, I decided to discontinue using them.

## Bibliography

Bailey, Justin Slocum. "Teaching Latin to Humans: How to Honor both the Language and the Learner." *Eidolon* Jan 4 2016.

Beard, Mary. "What does the Latin actually say?" *Times Literary Supplement*. Aug 11 2016.  
[http://timesonline.typepad.com/dons\\_life/2016/08/what-does-the-latin-actually-say.html](http://timesonline.typepad.com/dons_life/2016/08/what-does-the-latin-actually-say.html)

Carlson, Jacqueline M. "The Implications of SLA Research for Latin Pedagogy: Modernizing Latin Instruction and Securing its Place in Curricula." *Teaching Classical Languages* 4.2 (2013): 106-122.

Coffee, Neil. "Active Latin: Quo Tendimus?" *Classical World* 105.2 (2012): 255-269.

Lightbown, P., and N. Spada. *How Languages are Learned*. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Mahoney, Anne. "The Forms You Really Need to Know." *Classical Outlook* 81.3 (2004): 101-105.

Patrick, Robert. "Making Sense of Comprehensible Input in the Latin Classroom." *Online Companion to the Worlds of Roman Women*.

Toda, Keith. "No More Vocab Lists." *Totally Comprehensible Latin*. 3 Oct 2014. Blog. 7 May 2015.

Tunberg, Terence, and Milena Minkova. "Active Latin: Speaking, Writing, Hearing the Language." *New England Classical Journal* 39.2 (2012): 113-128.