

Paolo Asso

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Present Positions (sorry, I wear two hats at the moment):

- Resident Fellow at the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute of African and African-American Research, Harvard University (August 2011 – May 2012)
- Assistant Professor of Classical Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (*on leave* 2011-2012)

Publications:

My first book is a commentary on book 4 of Lucan's *Civil War* (DeGruyter, 2010). My second book is my edited *Brill's Companion to Lucan* (2011). As Du Bois Fellow, I am writing a monograph on the *Ideas of Africa in the Roman Literary Imagination*, presently focusing on Roman epic. I have published articles (and/or chapters) on Lucan, Silius, and Statius. My most recent article in print is "Queer Consolation: Melior's Dead Boy in Statius' *Silvae* 2.1," *AJP* (2010) 663-697.

Election Statement:

If elected on the WCC steering committee, I will work toward the following goals:

1. Increase the representation of women in tenured university positions.
2. Improve the status of gender studies and classics as interdisciplinary fields in discipline-oriented curricula.
3. Liaise with the Committee on the Status of Women and Minority Groups, of which I am currently a member, to work seamlessly toward common targets.

While some progress has been made in supporting women in classics, gender bias remains a sore issue. The most recent data available from the APA (2003-2004, under 'Professional Matters' on the APA website) suggest that much more needs to be done: tenured women represented 17% of the total classics faculty, vs. tenured men representing 42%. In the rank of full professor, only 29% are women. One promising feature of the last survey is that in Ph.D.-granting institutions newly hired faculty are equally represented on both sides of the gender line. What can the WCC do to improve the numbers in the highest ranks? However challenging it may be, we need to keep track of numbers more frequently as well as consistently. The CSWMG could come to our rescue, but CSWMG needs adequate APA-funded support to hire a competent statistician. The data I mentioned above are seven years old and they do not tell us anything about classics female faculty in senior administrative positions. Furthermore, the response rate needs to be higher than 60%. A conservatively realistic goal could be a 75% response rate, but the higher the better. One way to increase the response rate on such surveys could be to coordinate a volunteer taskforce. The taskforce volunteers could call, text, email our very busy and often unappreciated and overworked department chairs to insure that they return the survey with as much information as possible.

The next challenge is to find ways to insure that women seeking tenure are adequately supported in their quest for a balanced work and family life. A 2008 study conducted by a sociology Ph.D.-candidate at the request of the Associate Provost at the University of Chicago identifies six barriers to female faculty advancement: (1) overt and subtle gender

discrimination, (2) cumulative disadvantage, (3) inequitable resources, (4) lack of female leadership and role models, (5) isolation and marginalization, and (6) and work-family conflict. The study also outlines ways to address the needs of women seeking tenure as well as an adequate family life, listing in particular:

- Strong Childcare Provisions
- Give Faculty More Control over Their Time
- Tenure Clock Extensions and Stoppage
- Faculty Time Off, Flextime, Modified Duties, & Instructional Replacement
- Create Dual-Career Policies
- Provide Some Corporate-Style Benefits.

(<http://home.uchicago.edu/~eej75/terrienuofcprovostcasewriteup.htm>). Major research institutions tend to offer a combination of such services, but after tenure is achieved, the next question is: What would facilitate female classics faculty in achieving full-professor rank? As suggested by the University of Chicago study, the senior administrators of Ph.D.-granting institutions could be very interested in insuring the equitable treatment of female faculty in undergoing promotion to tenure or full professor, but I am convinced that we always need to take a fresh look at the numbers as well as the issues because the kind of discrimination women (as all underrepresented minorities) face today is much more subtle than it used to be. The relevant studies point to the existence of unstated or unrecognized assumptions that work against women faculty in all fields, and although in classics women have gained ground very slowly but steadily, the full professors are still male in 71% of the cases. We should ask what worked and how it worked for female faculty who succeeded in achieving full professor rank.

What definitely worked, I would argue, is the increased visibility of identity, gender, sexuality, and queer studies in the academic curriculum. Female as well as male faculty teach such courses, in which female as well as male students are enrolled. As a traditionally trained philologist, my skills are primarily textual and author-centered, but my current research interests mainly focus on identity (and not only gender). As a result, I have recently been asked: Am I a traditional philologist or am I interested in gender and identity? I ask in return: Why not both? Classics and gender studies are *both* interdisciplinary fields and from their commingling only more good can come.

If elected to the WCC steering committee I would work with the other members and liaise with the CSWMG to find ways to strengthen gender and identity studies in the classics undergraduate curricula especially in places where such interests are not as well represented as in the institutions in which I have had the fortune to work.

In the past year I have had the privilege of being a member of the APA Committee on the Status of Women and Minority Groups (CSWMG). I have also served at my institution as Diversity Ally at the Rackham School of Graduate Studies, where we have worked on finding ways to improve the success of women and other underrepresented minorities in the Ph.D.-program admission process. If elected to the WCC, I would bring to my work as steering committee member the experience I accumulated as well as the enthusiasm I continue to have in working toward resolving the issues that create barriers to female faculty advancement in classics.