The Language Pedagogy Project
2024-2025 Update

Overview

With the goal of making introductory Greek and Latin classes more accessible to a wider variety of students, the pedagogy team created 1) self-grading Quercus quizzes; 2) Anki flashcard decks; and 3) in-class activities for instructors to implement in 100-level courses.

We hypothesized that students would feel better supported in these classes if instruction 1) incorporated variety; 2) took student motivations into account; and 3) emphasized process over product (i.e. study habits over grades). Feedback emphasizing these three principles was solicited through online surveys and focus groups in each term.

The feedback from both students and instructors confirmed the validity of our three guiding principles and suggested that we have made significant progress in making these courses more accessible and supportive. The surveys and focus groups also helped us to identify several areas for future improvement through the revision of existing materials, the creation of new materials, and the inclusion of new topics and emphases in the August instructor training sessions.

Background

In Spring 2024 the language pedagogy team began a long-term project to update the way introductory and intermediate languages are taught in the Classics Department. Our goal was to make these Greek and Latin courses more supportive of and accessible to a wide range of students with varied backgrounds and learning styles. The language pedagogy team currently consists of:

- **Project Lead**: Adriana Brook, Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream
- **Greek Pedagogy RA**: Jeff Masse, PhD Candidate
- **Latin Pedagogy RA**: Jackson Thulien, PhD Candidate

Guiding Principles

Our initial work involved searching the literature and consulting with practitioners of language pedagogy across the university and beyond. This work yielded three over-arching principles that have guided the project so far:

1. **Variety**: The idea that most people learn in only one preferred way has been largely debunked; the most up-to-date research shows that exposure a wide variety of approaches and activities is ultimately the most helpful for the most people.

2. **Motivation**: Students are more likely to persist in a subject if instruction acknowledges the variability in their motivations for taking the class.

3. **Process Over Product**: Rather than emphasizing the product of learning (e.g. a test mark), instructors should emphasize the process of learning (study skills, daily habits etc.).

2024-2025 Pedagogy Team Activities

The pedagogy team created three types of resources to support language instruction this year:

Student-Facing Resources

1. **Quercus Quizzes**: These self-grading online quizzes are keyed to each chapter of *From Alpha to Omega* and *Wheelock's Latin*. Extensive question banks allow students to take each quiz 5-6 times before encountering any significant repetition. The quizzes include a wide variety of question types to hone different language skills.

2. **Anki Flashcards**: These decks correspond to each textbook chapter and include colour-coding, images, and usage notes to support students in memorizing and retaining vocabulary.

Instructor-Facing Resources

3. **In-Class Activities**: The activity bank for each language includes a broad selection of slides, handouts, activity instructions, and scripts (for oral Greek/Latin) to support instructors in incorporating a variety of in-class activity types throughout the term.

The following chart summarizes the work already completed for GRK/LAT 101 and 102 and the work underway for GRK/LAT 201 and (in the case of Latin) 202. While the full complement of 200-level resources will not be available until Fall 2025, many were introduced in Summer 2025.

Greek

	Chapters covered	Class Activities			Quercus Quizzes			Anki Flashcards		
		Goal	Actual	(Projected) Completion	Goal	Actual	(Projected) Completion	Goal	Actual	(Projected) Completion
Greek 101	1-20	2 per chapter (40)	42	August 2024	2 per chapter (40)	41	August 2024	All Ch 1-20 Vocab	1-20	August 2024
Greek 102	21-37	2 per chapter (34)	43	December 2024	2 per chapter (34)	36	December 2024	All Ch 21-37 Vocab	21-37	December 2024
Greek 201	38-50	2 per chapter (26)	-	Summer 2025	2 per chapter (26)	-	Summer 2025	All Ch 38-50 Vocab	-	Summer 2025

Latin

	Chapters covered	Class Activities			Quercus Quizzes			Anki Flashcards		
		Goal	Actual	(Projected) Completion	Goal	Actual	(Projected) Completion	Goal	Actual	(Projected) Completion
Latin 101	1-12	5 for every 2 chapters (30)	33	August 2024	5 for every 2 chapters (30)	30	August 2024	All Ch 1-12 Vocab	1-12	August 2024
Latin 102	13-24	5 for every 2 chapters (30)	34	December 2024	5 for every 2 chapters (30)	31	December 2024	All Ch 13-24 Vocab	13-24	December 2024
Latin 201	25-36	5 for every 2 chapters (30)	-	Summer 2025	5 for every 2 chapters (30)	-	Summer 2025	All Ch 25-36 Vocab	-	Summer 2025
Latin 202	37-40	5 for every 2 chapters (10)	-	Summer 2025	5 for every 2 chapters (10)	-	Summer 2025	All Ch 37-40 Vocab	-	Summer 2025

Student-facing materials were posted on the Quercus page for each section of 100-level Greek and Latin this year and instructors introduced them in class.

Instructor-facing materials, which were posted on the departmental SharePoint, were disseminated in a number of ways:

- Language coordination meetings (August 2024)
- Instructor training (August 2024)
- Weekly language pedagogy emails
- In-term instructor meetings
- Fall-to-Winter transition instructor meetings

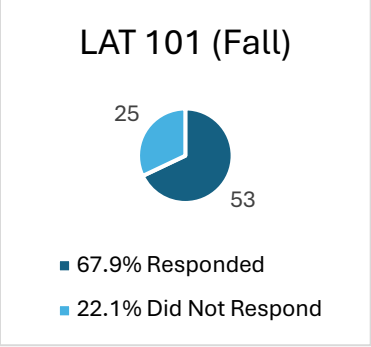
Feedback Solicited

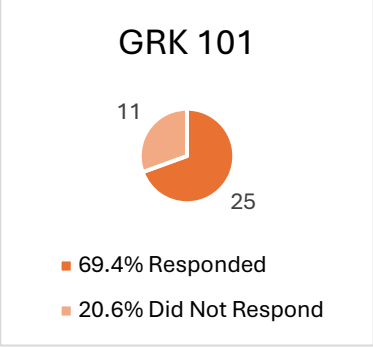
The pedagogy team solicited student and instructor feedback on these materials during the 2024-2025 academic year.

- We invited all 100-level language students to complete an online survey. Students who completed the survey could choose to enter a randomized draw for a chance to win an iTunes, President's Choice, or Amazon gift card.
- We held multiple focus groups to facilitate more in-depth conversation about the language courses.
    - Fall 2024
        - GRK 101
        - LAT 101
        - Instructors
    - Winter 2025
        - GRK 102
        - LAT 101 and 102
        - Instructors

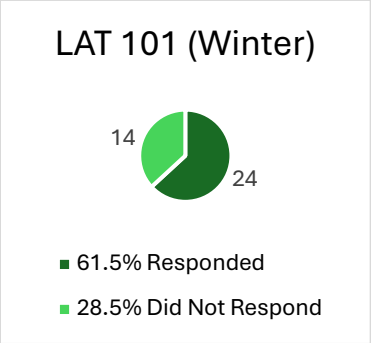
Participation Rates

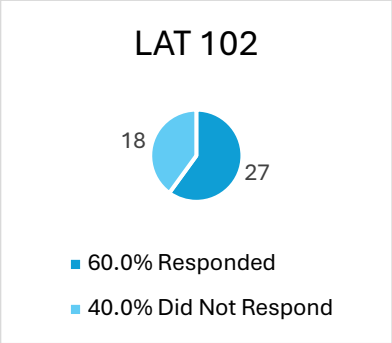
Fall 2024 Survey Participation

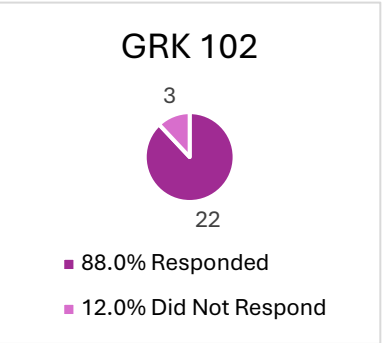




Winter 2025 Survey Participation







Focus Group Participation*

	LAT 101	GRK 101	LAT 102	GRK 102	Instructors
Fall 2024	2	2	N/A	N/A	4
Winter 2025	2	N/A	2	2	4

*1 instructor taught in both Fall and Winter and participated in both instructor focus groups. There were no other overlaps in participation.

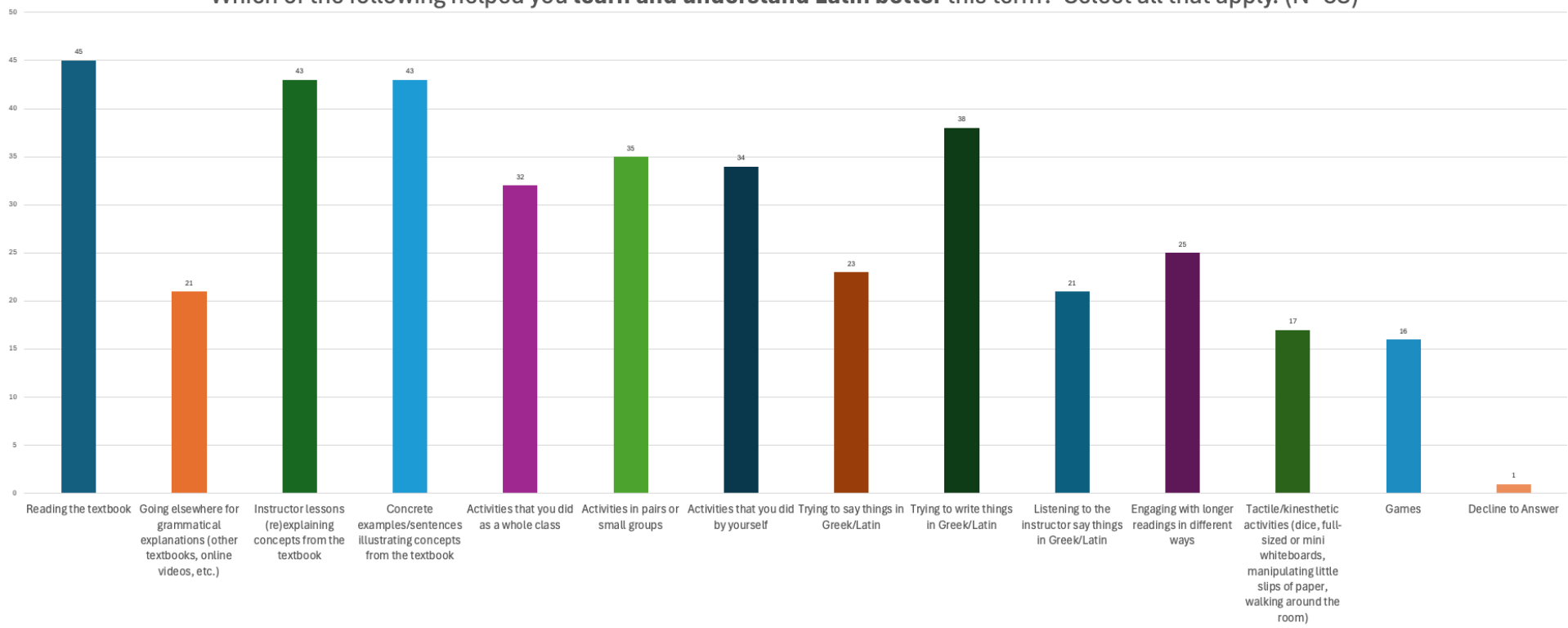
Initial Findings

Below we summarize our major takeaways from the past year. Members of the Classics Department with existing access can read the full summary of survey results (PDF) in the departmental SharePoint.

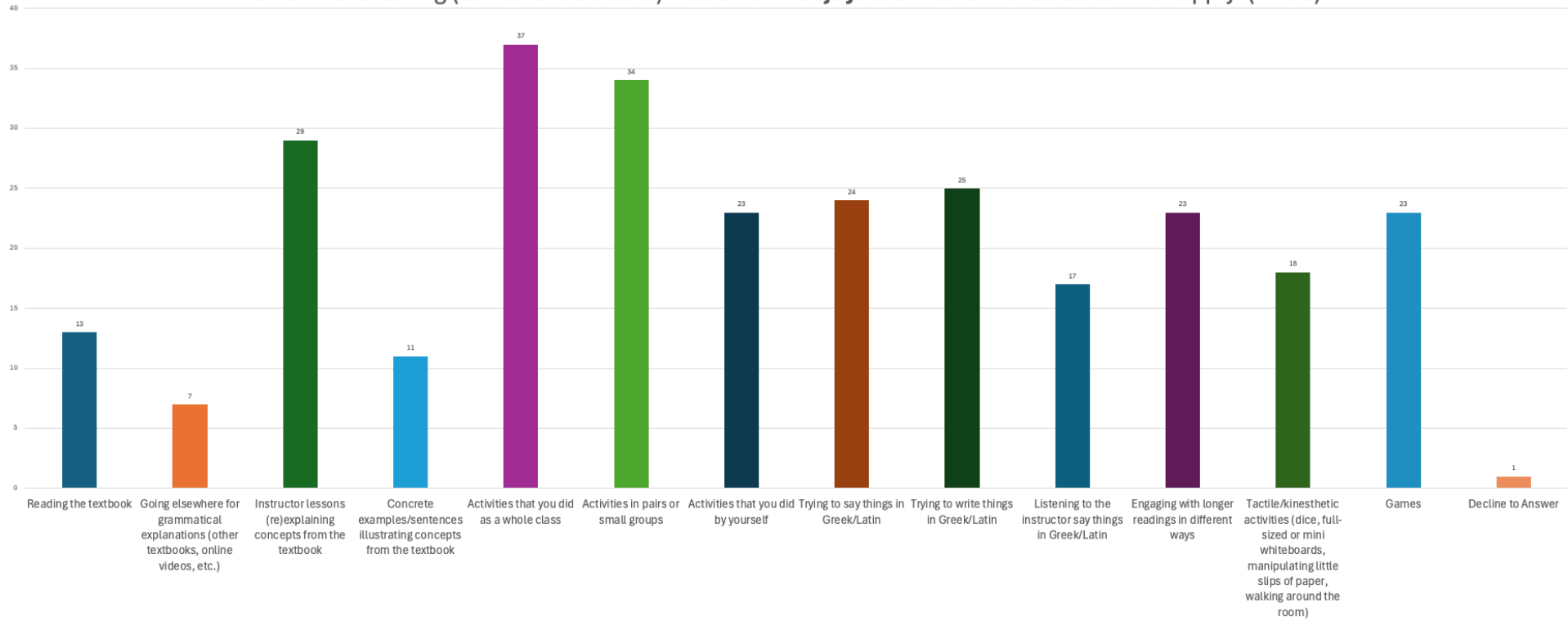
Three Guiding Principles Confirmed

Variety

Survey and focus group data from all terms and classes confirmed the importance of providing a variety of different ways to engage with Greek and Latin. When we asked students to tell us what helped them learn the most and what they found most enjoyable, we found that every single approach in the list of options provided was helpful and/or enjoyable to at least some portion of the class as illustrated (by way of example) in the data from Fall LAT 101 below.


Which of the following helped you **learn and understand Latin better** this term? Select all that apply. (N=53)
50
45
40
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
45
21
43
43
32
35
34
23
38
21
25
17
16
1
Reading the textbook
Going elsewhere for grammatical explanations (other textbooks, online videos, etc.)
Instructor lessons (re)explaining concepts from the textbook
Concrete examples/sentences illustrating concepts from the textbook
Activities that you did as a whole class
Activities in pairs or small groups
Activities that you did by yourself
Trying to say things in Greek/Latin
Trying to write things in Greek/Latin
Listening to the instructor say things in Greek/Latin
Engaging with longer readings in different ways
Tactile/kinesthetic activities (dice, full-sized or mini whiteboards, manipulating little slips of paper, walking around the room)
Games
Decline to Answer

Which of the following (same list as above) **made Latin enjoyable** this term? Select all that apply. (N=53)



On average, students found instructor explanations the most **helpful** and full-class activities the most **enjoyable**.

The importance of variety also came up frequently in student comments in both the survey and the focus groups.

"I think that using a variety of different activities/ways of learning Greek made it a lot easier to comprehend than if just one method was used. Being able to use my brain in different ways on different days, such as working alone one day or working in a group another day, helped me to look at the content in different ways. Further, having a variety of activities made class engaging each day since every class would be slightly different." (Fall Survey, Greek 101)

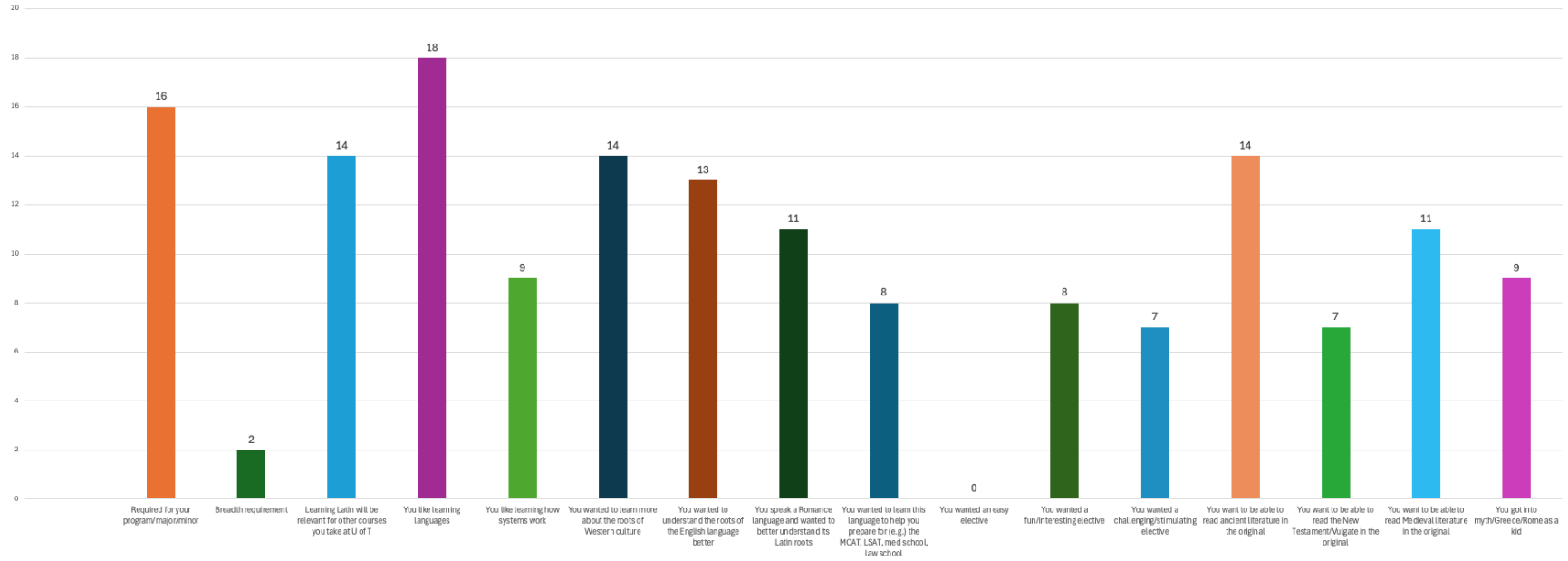
"But we have so many [activities], we keep rotating through them. I feel like you just end up seeing, you feel what works with you, and it allows you to, you know, maybe—when I'm studying by myself, I don't go to the things that didn't help me, I have all these options now and I can pick through the things that I know did help me in class." (Winter Focus Group, Latin 101)

[Advice offered to a hypothetical instructor] *"Don't be afraid of variety while teaching. I think that it is important to cover grammar in class but also engaging students in games, group translation, and stories in Latin is also important for a more well-rounded understanding of the language."* (Winter Survey, Latin 102)

Motivation

Feedback also confirmed that students are taking these classes for many reasons. In particular, survey data showed that many students are not taking Greek or Latin with the hope of 'reading the canon' or on their way to graduate school. The chart below illustrates the varied reasons students have for taking a language class, using LAT 102 as a representative example. Note that, with the exception of the Winter section of LAT 101, the option "You wanted an easy elective" was selected by at least two students in all other classes (including GRK 102!).

Why did you sign up to take Latin this term? Select all that apply. (N=27)

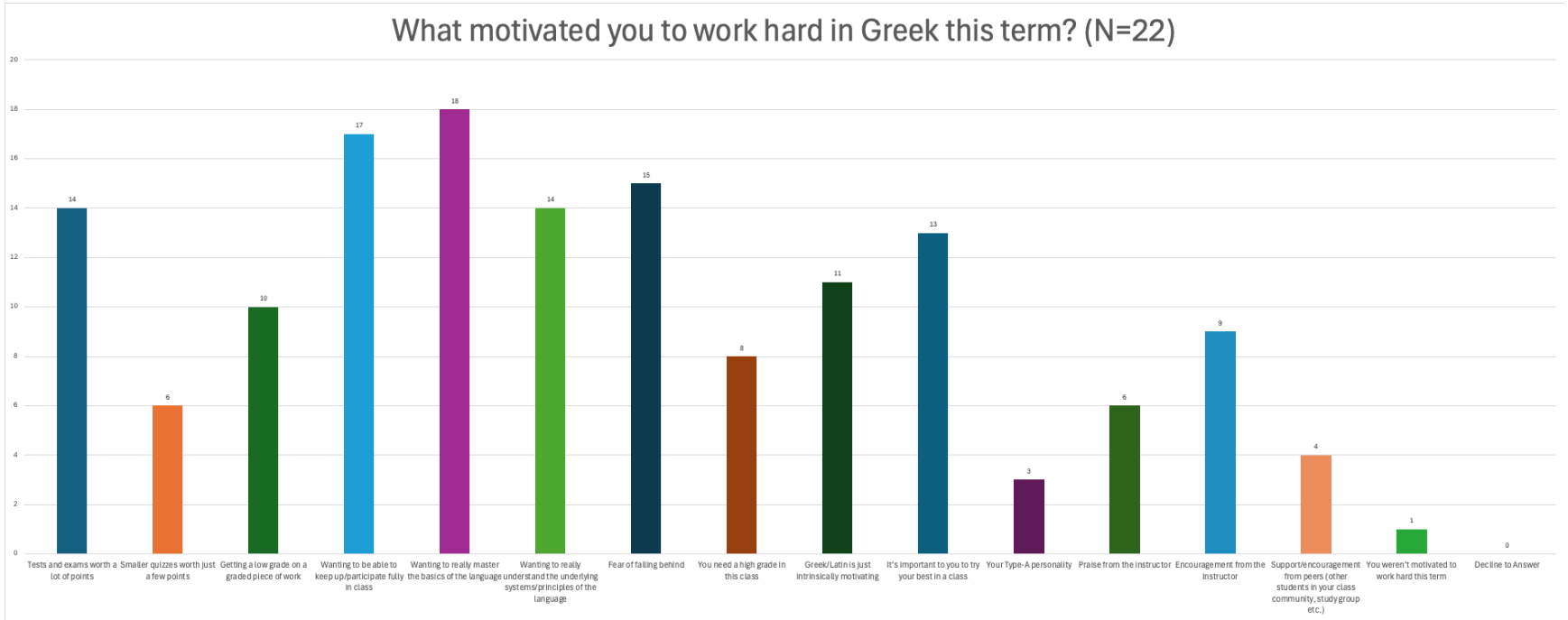


While students from all classes reported a wide variety of motivations for taking Greek or Latin, two differences among the 100-level language classes are worthy of note:

- Students are more likely to take Greek (as compared to Latin) for a specific academic purpose like fulfilling a major requirement of preparing for graduate studies

- Students who take LAT 101 in the Winter term (by contrast with LAT 101 in the Fall) are more likely to be taking Latin 'just because' and more students in this semester opt take the first class in the language sequence with no intention of continuing to LAT 102

Students also reported a wide variety of motivations for working hard in their language classes. Every source of motivation we mentioned on the survey was selected by at least some students in every class. The graph below shows the results for GRK 102 as an example.


What motivated you to work hard in Greek this term? (N=22)
20
18
16
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
14
6
10
17
18
14
15
8
11
13
3
6
9
4
1
0
Tests and exams worth a lot of points
Smaller quizzes worth just a few points
Getting a low grade on a graded piece of work
Wanting to be able to keep up/participate fully in class
Wanting to really master the basics of the language
Wanting to really understand the underlying systems/principles of the language
Fear of falling behind
You need a high grade in this class
Greek/Latin is just intrinsically motivating
It's important to you to try your best in a class
Your Type-A personality
Praise from the instructor
Encouragement from the instructor
Support/encouragement from peers (other students in your class community, study group etc.)
You weren't motivated to work hard this term
Decline to Answer

It is worthy of note that, across all classes, more students were motivated by "Wanting to really master the basics" than by "Tests and exams worth a lot of points". The feedback we received suggests that it is important to tap into students' intrinsic motivations when possible, rather than relying exclusively on extrinsic motivators like grades.

Process over Product

Anecdotal evidence from instructors suggests that our efforts to help students cultivate good at-home study habits are having an impact.

"The very first day of class I found it super useful to use [the slides] about the learning strategies. I think a big part of it is getting [students] to be more self-reflective about what kind of learners they are. And that's really deeply related to how to memorize things." (Latin Instructor)

More specifically, the instructors felt that the materials we had provided to students to support at-home study – Quercus quizzes and Anki flashcard decks – were working as intended for the students who made use of them. Regarding the quizzes:

"On the last midterm, I had only I think three students miss vocab questions. And I think that is because of the quizzes. Because they see all the words cycling in front of their eyes all the time." (Greek Instructor)

"I didn't require [Quercus quizzes] and I wish I had." (Latin Instructor)

Instructors had similarly positive things to say about the Anki flashcard decks we provided to students, though they weren't always sure which students were using them.

"Their vocabulary recall is excellent, especially compared to last year, where I remember, along with the pacing, it was probably the second biggest challenge, i.e. that was there was too much to memorize." (Latin Instructor)

"The vocab has been strong across the board. So, I think they are using [the Anki decks]." (Latin Instructor)

On the student side, survey feedback showed that students were nearly universally cognizant of the importance of consistent and varied forms of at-home practice to help them succeed in and enjoy the class. This came through most clearly in the responses to the question "Based on your experiences this term, what advice would you give to a fellow student who has decided to take 100-level Latin next year?"

Students also appreciated the resources we provided to support this at-home work. Regarding the Quercus quizzes:

"My quizzes, a lot of them have like 10-15 attempts, or whatever, and multiple ones where the grade was fine, but a lot of ones where I'll get like 2 out of 10, 3 out of 10. And I find it helps me to learn by doing." (Fall Focus Group, Greek 101)

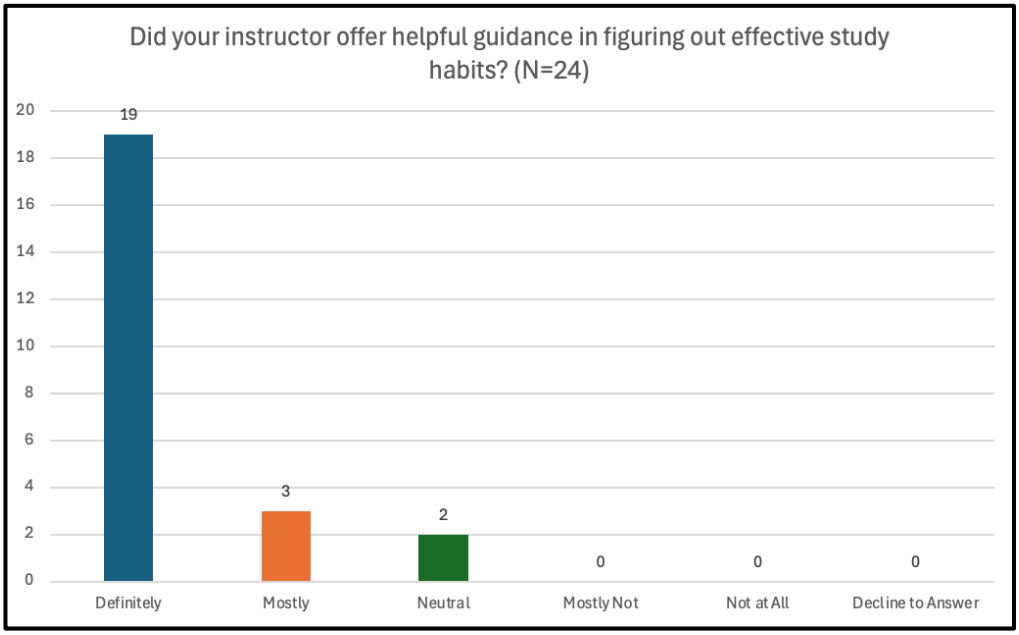
"I started doing the quizzes because of the marks, but then I found it useful." (Winter Survey, Latin 101)

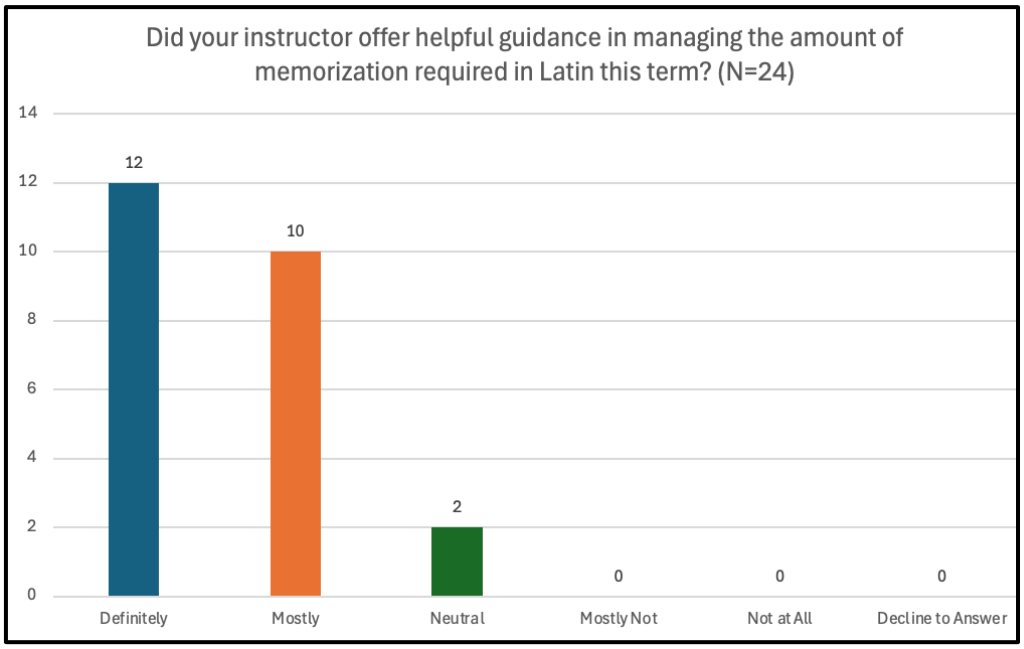
As for the Anki flashcards:

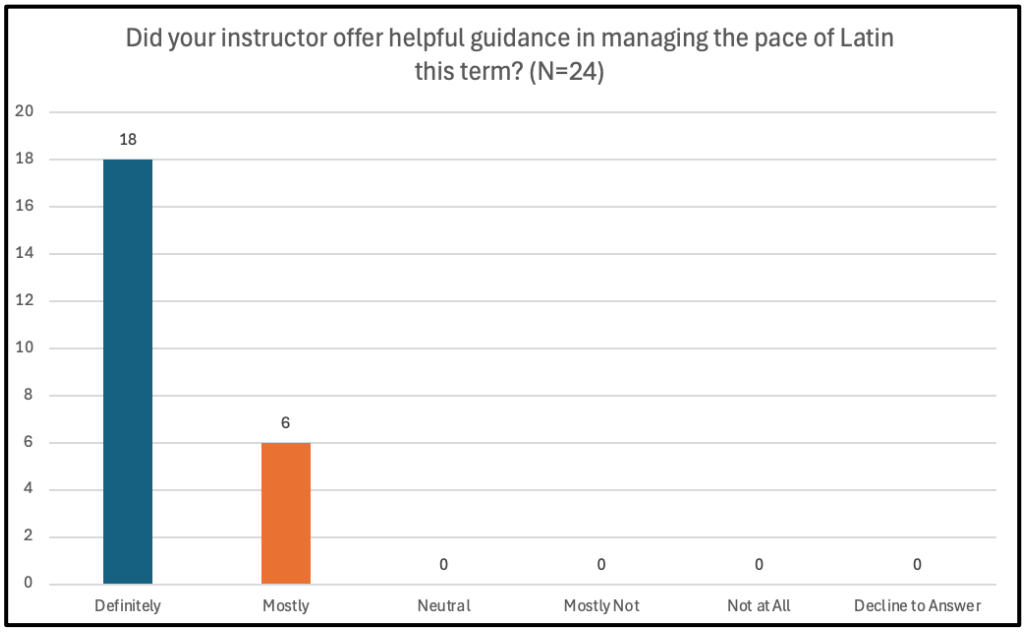
"I do find that the flashcards are really helpful because they're just something I can do when I can't do anything else, when I'm on the subway." (Fall Focus Group, Latin 101)

[Advice to a hypothetical student] *"Anki flashcards are more helpful than you'll initially give them credit for."* (Winter Survey, Latin 102)

Finally, it's important to emphasize the central role of the instructor in helping students focus on process over product in their language learning. The following graphs showing data from the Winter LAT 101 survey illustrate the strong student perception that instructors were **definitely** or **mostly** providing helpful guidance in developing effective learning practices.


Did your instructor offer helpful guidance in figuring out effective study habits? (N=24)
20
18
16
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
19
3
2
0
0
0
Definitely
Mostly
Neutral
Mostly Not
Not at All
Decline to Answer


Did your instructor offer helpful guidance in managing the amount of memorization required in Latin this term? (N=24)
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
12
10
2
0
0
0
Definitely
Mostly
Neutral
Mostly Not
Not at All
Decline to Answer


Did your instructor offer helpful guidance in managing the pace of Latin this term? (N=24)
20
18
16
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
18
6
0
0
0
0
Definitely
Mostly
Neutral
Mostly Not
Not at All
Decline to Answer

Other Themes in Student and Instructor Feedback

From Students

- The single biggest contributing factor in a student's language learning experience is their instructor
- While there were students studying each language who found that the course moved too quickly or too slowly, most students found that the pace was manageable in both Greek and Latin
- A majority of students find gratification in engaging with longer readings, especially when these are not too difficult and adapted as little as possible from real sources
- Students would like their instructors to consider *both* what is helpful *and* what is fun – these sometimes overlap, but they are often distinct and complementary

From Instructors

- Instructors are more likely to try activities in class if they are demoed in detail during the August training session
- Instructors were glad to be able to refer students to various departmentally generated resources in response to requests for extra help or extra practice materials
- It is unrealistic for instructors to use every resource/activity provided; however, all instructors found it helpful to be able to draw inspiration from and/or adapt the large variety of materials provided
    - As with students, there is no "one-size-fits-all" when it comes to instructors and it's important to provide a variety of instructional supports
- Instructors echoed students in the observation that longer readings are almost universally popular among students; more resources are needed to support instructors in helping students engage with readings in different ways

Biggest Areas for Improvement

- Even with the new resources, memorization remains a major pain point for many students
- While *Wheelock's Latin* seems to be working well for both students and instructors, the dense and prose-y *From Alpha to Omega* presents more challenges
    - That being said, *neither* textbook sufficiently covers a) English grammar for Latin learners b) the case system – more in-class support is needed for both
- The Quercus quiz interface is finnicky and some quizzes contain errors/typos, which undermine their utility
- Some students had technical difficulties with the Anki decks/app

- While there has been some success introducing elements of spoken Latin and (to a lesser extent) Greek in introductory classes, scaffolding and more consistency are needed to make active language accessible and useful

Biggest Successes

- Both students and instructors are benefitting from the variety that's been incorporated into the new curricular materials
- Instructors feel well supported and feel confident trying new approaches in their classes
- Technical issues aside, the Quercus quizzes and Anki flashcards are genuinely helpful to the students who choose to use them
- Instructors see significant gains in vocabulary acquisition and retention compared with previous years and attribute this to the quizzes and flashcards provided

Most importantly, the feedback we received confirms that the language classes feel accessible, supportive, and fun to a broad range of students – in other words, we are already making good progress toward the central goal of the language pedagogy project.

The following quotations offer a representative sample of the feedback we received in this vein.

"Basically everything we did in class was really fun, and in my opinion, anything will be easier to learn if it is fun." (Fall Survey, Latin 101)

"I think the course, the way it being structured, I think is more accessible and I think compared to when I did the Latin [in a previous year], it doesn't feel as intimidating . . . it seems very approachable for people from all backgrounds." (Fall Focus Group, Greek 101)

"I found this course both academically and emotionally comforting." (Fall Survey, Latin 101)

[Latin class] felt a bit more like a high school class instead of university classes, with smaller class sizes, in class tests, and more opportunities to ask questions and discuss problems, which I found very nice and I felt that it was a really good transition class that helped ease me into university life." (Fall Survey, Latin 101)

"I've previously taken German and Spanish at U of T and I found this Latin course to be the most well taught out of the three." (Winter Survey, Latin 101)

"100-Level Latin is an amazing course with so many opportunities for learning. While it may be challenging in a new environment, the course is structured in a way that is friendly to beginner learners and there are many activities to help!" (Winter Survey, Latin 102)

"I thought I was gonna really struggle 'cause – how do you even? – I couldn't even fathom how you learn another language. But it was not as intimidating as I thought." (Winter Focus Group, Latin 101)

Next Steps

While we've made good progress, there is still work to do.

Short-term – Summer 2025

In Summer 2025, the pedagogy team is working to address some of the immediate areas for improvement identified this year.

Starting in June, two RAs have been hired to proofread and reformat the Greek and Latin Quercus quizzes. While Quercus has inherent limitations that we cannot overcome (e.g., its inconsistent ability to recognize Greek accents and breathing marks), we hope to mitigate many of the frustrating aspects of these quizzes before the Fall.

This summer, we are also working to revise the materials used in the training provided to language instructors each August in collaboration with the 2025-2026 Language Coordinator.

The pedagogy team is also working to create several new materials:

- Student-facing materials
    - Additional Quercus quizzes to help with learning principal parts
    - Additional Anki flashcards to help with learning paradigms/endings
    - Daily/weekly checklists that students can use to organize at-home study

- Instructor-facing materials
    - Materials for teaching English grammar for students of Latin/Greek, especially the case system
    - Additional in-class activities that focus on:
        - Engaging with readings in different ways
        - More cultural and historical content
        - More support for memorization
        - A more consistent approach to active language

Longer-term – Academic Year 2025-26

In Fall 2025 the full complement of resources to support GRK 201 and LAT 201/202 will be available to both students and instructors.

We will continue to administer online surveys in all 100-level classes in Fall 2025 and Winter 2026. We will invite 200-level students to participate this year, too.

Four focus groups will run in the Winter term: 1) 100-level Greek; 2) 100-level Latin; 3) 200-level Greek and Latin; 4) instructors.

In response to the new feedback we receive, the pedagogy team will consider further revisions to existing materials. Starting in Winter 2026, we will also begin to consider ways to offer better support to students and instructors in the post-textbook intermediate class (GRK/LAT 202).

July 2025
Adriana Brook
Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream