



Sustained Excellence
in Tertiary Teaching
General Category

Dr Maxine Lewis

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“I feel privileged to teach subjects that I am passionate about to enthusiastic students from whom I learn so much. I am deeply committed to bringing knowledge of the ancient Greek and Roman world to students in Aotearoa New Zealand, while celebrating how their unique knowledge and approach sheds new light on this ancient material.”

A senior lecturer in classics and ancient history at the University of Auckland, Maxine keeps three key premises at the front of her teaching practices. They are: education must be meaningful, equitable and accessible; teaching should respond to individual students; and self-reflection and continual professional development are crucial.

Maxine began teaching the history, culture and languages of ancient Greece and Rome at the University of Sydney in 2007. Since joining the University of Auckland in 2012, she has regularly taught six courses a year, spanning both language and history. She teaches a wide range of students, from first-year undergraduates to Masters students and has created new courses with content taken from her academic research. She has radically revised existing courses and taken a leadership role in curriculum planning in her department. She also co-teaches and coordinates team teaching, highlights of which were co-teaching Study Abroad courses in Rome with Associate Professor Jeremy Armstrong (2014, 2017, 2020) and working with the Ako Arts team to deliver a Classics course within a Māori pedagogical framework, for which her team won a Faculty of Arts Staff Excellence Award for Rangatiratanga (2019). In 2016, she won a Faculty of Arts Teaching Excellence Award.

In her large lecture courses, Maxine’s te reo pepeha is the first step of many that she takes to bring te ao Māori into a disciplinary space more often associated with European culture. It signals her respect for tangata whenua and their understandings of the world. She shows how Māori worldviews can help scholars navigate ancient Greek and Roman mythology and culture. With new Latin cohorts, she uses a Latin introduction as, like the pepeha, sharing important aspects of her life connects her authentically with the students.

Maxine is passionate about making ancient Greek and Roman material accessible and uses multiple techniques to show students how we can decolonise Classical Studies. She includes marginalised voices from Ancient Greece and Rome by teaching sources produced by women, slaves, ethnic minorities and those with transgressive sexual identities. She teaches students about the histories of the discipline, asking them to consider how knowledge is produced, shared and used, and its historical effect. During their Study Abroad course in Rome, as well as visiting classical sites, Maxine and her co-teacher, Jeremy investigated sites that Mussolini created, showing students how Ancient Roman architecture, language and iconography were used to legitimize fascism.

Maxine adopts specific teaching practices to create a welcoming tauhi vā, a space among the participants, and tailors these to the particular course. The Study Abroad course in Rome requires almost a month of intensive teaching and round-the-clock pastoral care. Extra-curricular activities may include ancient Rome-themed games or informal, spoken 'Latin clubs.' On campus, all her classes are interactive, regardless of size. She learns students' names, regularly invites comments and thanks students who bring questions. After posing her own questions to classes, she gets students into small groups to workshop their responses and circulates between these. When the students share their ideas with the whole group, the class hears a range of voices.

To create a safe learning environment for at-risk students, such as LGBTQI youth, Maxine teaches Greco-Roman texts that depict same-sex desire and fluid gender practices. In 2014, she published a book chapter on how to foster trans- and intersex inclusivity when teaching Latin. As a proponent of diversity and equity in education, she focuses on providing manaakitanga for Māori and Pasifika students.

In 2018, Maxine was invited to take leadership of her department's biggest course, Classical Mythology. After seeking advice, she came up with a new Ako-based version of the course for Semester 1, 2019. She themed the course around orality, oral traditions and the functions of myths, including transmitting genealogy/whakapapa, knowing that these elements resonated with Māori and Pasifika students. The ako framework led students to excel in achieving the course's learning outcomes, especially those relating to oral and written communication, and Māori and Pasifika performed extremely well. A vocal advocate for Ako Arts, she has disseminated her teaching strategies, mentoring colleagues one-to-one in History and Classics, and running an ako training session at the School of Humanities' planning day.

"I encourage them to think beyond grades, to the way that learning a language opens new worlds for us that we can explore our whole lives."

Whilst many of Maxine's students are initially focused on achieving "A" grades, she considers real success is embedding a language in one's life so that it has ongoing personal meaning and relevance and ensures it isn't forgotten. To this end, she develops a relationship with each student and gives them individual help. This may be help with translating a modern song into Ancient Greek, sourcing Latin videos and podcasts, or giving a bonus tutorial in Medieval Latin to inspire further reading.

Maxine tailors her teaching methods to fit individual students and student cohorts, for example, teaching Ancient Greek. To cater for the variance of students' learning styles, she created a suite of audio and audio-visual materials. She also offers a range of techniques students can use to learn vocabulary, such as online self-testing sites, flash-cards, listening to her recordings and videos or learning words in context.

Learning languages is a vital part of Maxine's professional development and helps her understand people and their culture. In 2014 she started learning Italian, to better facilitate her Study Abroad course. That led her to begin learning to speak Latin and, since 2017, she has attended three international Latin speaking camps, taken an online spoken course, and begun her own informal speaking group on campus for students and staff. Most recently, she has been studying te reo Māori. As students learn language best through a combination of listening, speaking, writing and reading, not just translating, Maxine has built up the range of Comprehensible Input (CI) activities used in the Latin classroom. These include scaffolded written texts, speaking in Latin, using props and staging dramatic scenes. Students in her classes still read original Latin, learn authentic vocabulary, write grammatically correct Latin and rigorously apply the rules of grammar, but they do so in an engaging and collaborative classroom context.
