

Your excellency the minister for education,

Your excellency the deputy minister for foreign affairs,

Your excellency the Rector of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens,

Your excellency the Dean of the School of Philosophy,

Madame Director,

Fellow Professors,

Esteemed Guests,

Dear Friends,

Dear Students.

The BA in the Archaeology, History, and Literature of Ancient Greece was created only a few years ago, as a bridge of academic collaboration and friendly exchange of knowledge between our University – the largest state institution of higher learning in Greece, and one of the largest universities in Europe – and the world at large; rather than waiting for Athens eventually to be discovered, we came to you, wherever you may have been across the globe, wishing to share what we know best: the archaeology, the history, and the literature of Ancient Greece. And, even more, we decided to stage this formidable endeavour in the scenery of culture and learning that the city of Athens has always been.

It is my great pleasure, therefore, to welcome our students to this celebration of continuing knowledge and its rewards; and in particular, I am happy – and indeed honoured – to welcome to this stately Hall you, our newest entrants, and promise you that the following weeks, months and years will be among the best times in your life. A time of learning about your chosen subject: the archaeology, the history, and the literature of Ancient Greece. A time that is bound to transform Athens – “the eye of Greece, mother of arts and eloquence” in John Milton’s famous verse, into your own alma mater.

BAAG offers a wide-ranging first degree devoted to Classical Greek culture. Students have the opportunity to study the archaeological monuments and the history of Greece. They familiarize themselves with the ancient Greek and Latin language through the systematic examination of important ancient texts. The interdisciplinary nature of the program enables students to get to know ancient Greece in depth, and through all its expressions – artistic, cultural, historical.

As the video we just watched points out, all archaeology classes, as well as most history and literature classes, include field trips to archaeological sites and museums within Athens and its environs; in addition, students are expected to participate in a series of longer field trips around Greece, including the Peloponnese (and the sites of Mycenae, Olympia and Epidaurus among others), Central Greece (for example the site of Delphi), as well as some of the islands, and most notably Crete. Students are also welcome to attend, on a voluntary basis and subject to their academic schedule, the Departmental Archaeological Excavation in Marathon, but also a number of additional fieldwork projects.

And believe me when I say, as one of the professors who has led some of those fieldtrips – be they far or near, from as far as Olympia and Delphi, or as close to home as the Pnyx and the Acropolis itself, there is no teaching experience I would value higher than this; than the opportunity to tread the ancient roads alongside one's own students, sharing with them the joy of discovery (or rediscovery as the case may be), sharing with them one's own knowledge about the classical past, and at the same time becoming wiser through their own observations and insights, even their questions (especially those devoid of an easy answer).

The program is available to international citizens, and is suitable for high school graduates with an interest in the ancient world and its cultural and intellectual achievements; also, for anybody who wishes to acquire a broad liberal education with an emphasis on original and avant-garde thinking. The four years are divided into eight semesters. The first year offers a number of foundation courses in the history and culture of ancient Greece, as well as an introduction to the methodology of the respective academic

fields of archaeology, history and philology. The second and third years are devoted to the systematic study of ancient Greece, while the fourth year offers an array of specialized courses and seminars.

Our aim is to bring together three complementary disciplines from the field of Classics; our multidisciplinary curriculum, taught by a diverse staff consisting of highly specialized academics and senior researchers, combines the strengths of the three disciplines in a single, innovative Degree: let me take you, very briefly, through our Programme's main components.

And allow me, as an archaeologist myself, to start with the subject dearest to my heart: Archaeology. The Program includes a systematic survey of prehistoric and ancient Greek archaeology and art. The first six semesters feature course topics such as Minoan and Mycenaean Prehistory, the social significance of ancient Greek art and iconography, the development of ancient Greek architecture and city planning and the relations of the Greek world to the civilisations of the eastern Mediterranean, such as the Hittites, the Egyptians and the Persians. The seventh and eighth semesters feature two seminars that afford in-depth study of specific archaeological topics. The Program places great emphasis upon on-site classes in museums and archaeological sites in Greece, as well as upon hands-on instruction in the University Museum of Archaeology and History of Art and many more.

History comes next; Roughly one third of the Program overall consists of History classes: beginning with an Introduction to Historical Studies in the first semester, students are guided through Greek history with a series of courses on the Greek polis, Alexander the Great and Hellenistic Greece, Greece and Rome, history of religion and sports, as well as a more specialized course in the study of inscriptions and a seminar on the artistic and historical significance of Greek coins.

And finally, Ancient Greek and Latin Literature. Our Program encompasses a wide range of courses on ancient Greek and Latin literature, across their main periods of development and their most important genres. Students also receive intensive instruction in the Classical Greek and Latin languages. Students get to know major authors and genres of Greek and Latin literature, including Homer and epic, drama, historiography (Herodotus,

Thucydides, Xenophon), philosophy and oratory, poetry (such as Ovid), as well as the world of ancient papyri. Courses in religion and myth broaden their understanding of the Greek culture and its continuity into the Roman era. The study of literary masterpieces of the Roman world, with a focus on the interactions between Greek and Roman literature, enables students to understand the importance of the Ancient world for the Western tradition and our own, contemporary world.

Esteemed guests, ladies and gentlemen, dear students, old and new.

When we were planning the launching of this program, the first in Greece to be taught entirely in English and targeted towards an exclusively international audience, we hardly envisaged its success (even though we were also sadly struck by the adversity of the Covid-19 global pandemic, breaking out only a few weeks into our first ever application period back in early 2020, and continuing well into our first academic year of 2020-21). In our effort, we were however fortunate to be offered the unconditional support of the Greek state and the political as well as administrative personnel of (first and foremost) the Ministry of Education, but also the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who were able – I guess – to see the potential of our project, and thought it worthy of their encouragement.

This is how it came to pass, that despite some unforeseen difficulties such as the pandemic, we have managed so far to maintain an enrolment of eighty students from twenty-one different countries. Let me list them for you: Albania, Australia, Canada, China, Egypt, El Salvador, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, India, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, South Africa, the UK, Ukraine, and the USA.

In our Program, we have also managed to offer shorter terms of residence (ranging from a full semester to a full academic year) to a considerable number of visiting students, through a series of bilateral agreements between our university and a number of foreign institutions, including SouthWest and NorthWest Universities in China, and the Universities of Tennessee and Cincinnati in the US, with a few more to follow. We pride ourselves in having managed to attract students from such esteemed universities to our own, and we promise to continue our efforts in this

respect; and perhaps with some further encouragement and support by the state, Ministers Pierakakis and Kotsiras.

And as in a few months, we will be gathering once again in this very Hall to hand out their diplomas – the first ever in the history of this country – to our graduating class of 2020, I expect a sense of pride and accomplishment to envelope us all.

Mr Minister, Mr deputy Minister, Dear Rector, Madame Director and Fellow Professors, thank you.

Dear students, welcome to Athens!