



Miriam Bissett – Interview

What is your current job?

I am the Tertiary Counsellor for an international college which provides a one year foundation course for entry into New Zealand universities.

What is your highest degree (and major)? Where did you study?

I have my PhD in Ancient History with a focus on Greek Art. I completed all of my studies (BA, MA, PhD) at the University of Auckland.

What drew you to Classical Studies, Ancient History, Egyptology, and/or ancient languages?

Funny story. I had never studied Classics and I had two spaces in my second semester of my BA timetable in my first year. The only subjects that fitted between my part time job and my other two courses were the stage one Classical Studies paper and the stage one Greek history paper. From the very first Classics lecture I was by turns stimulated, stunned, excited, shocked, and completely, utterly hooked. I never looked back: I changed my major and pressed on to postgraduate study!

What was the name of your favourite paper?

That *is* a difficult question. They were all excellent. However, based solely on the impact it had on me, I would have to choose Love and Death in Greek and Roman Literature. And because I like to break the rules sometimes, I shall choose a second: Art and Society in Ancient Greece.

How has your studies in Classical Studies, Ancient History, Egyptology, and/or ancient languages benefited you in looking for employment?

I didn't have to look for employment. My Classics major made my first job come to me. And as soon as I had successfully defended my PhD, people offered me other roles. What I can say is that the rigorous training I had in my degrees allowed me to write reports, think of solutions, argue coherently, manage people, and organise events and activities effectively. These skills have in turn provided me with so many opportunities, made my current job easy and given me the chance to upskill and get involved in lots of professional development. All I had to do was to say yes.

What skills have you learnt in the process of your studies that are transferable to an industry based job?

Most importantly I have learnt to deal with people from all walks of life. By studying society through ancient art, literature, and history I have gained invaluable skills in understanding how people respond to various situations. If I was more sentimental I would call it empathy, but in a nod to honesty I shall instead say that I learnt psychology, politics, and management in one major. Of course, I have also had much practice in proof-reading, editing, managing my time, organising,

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writing, teaching, presenting, researching, and creating. Nevertheless, I maintain that the most useful skill I gained was people management in a society where administration rules. That, and having those two magic letters, D and R, in front of my name. It opens so many doors!

What do you like the most about your studies? Has it improved your quality of life?

The first part of that question is either deceptively simple or requires a thesis in response. I shall opt for the simple answer: all of it. The subject matter never ceases to provide me with new discoveries and has the incredible characteristic of being relevant to every situation. I especially love the lecturers, tutors, and my peers. Classicists (and Ancient Historians and ancient linguists) are a magnificent breed. We need more of them! Has it improved my quality of life? Of course. People assume I am smarter than I really am. I do not disabuse them.

What do you think is the biggest misconception about studying Classical Studies, Ancient History, Egyptology, and/or ancient languages?

The biggest misconception? Definitely that these subjects are a) useless and b) easy. I have had people ask me why I was doing my studies in Greek art and wasting tax payers' money. Educating young people in the arts (including Classics, Ancient History, and languages) is the only hope we have of surviving the approaching apocalypse. How are we to combat the myriad societal issues arising from technology, environmental problems, extremism, and political instability? We must encourage readers, thinkers, and analysers – in short, we *must* train people to nourish and understand their humanity.

Who is your favourite god or goddess? Why?

Ha! I completed the online quiz for the website here and received the dubious honour of being Dionysos with a side order of Aphrodite and Apollo. Analyse away, psychologists! If I must choose a deity, I would be hard-pressed to decide between Aphrodite and Artemis. Aphrodite, as the face for one of the most complex and powerful forces in the known world, is an obvious choice. Having Aphrodite as an enemy is emotional suicide! Artemis has the demanding role of looking after teenage girls; to do this she shows a ferocity and protectiveness that one can only admire. In addition, she is a strong, independent woman, ignoring all the conventions to which she should adhere. What's not to like? Unless you're a man, of course.

If you could invite three people in ancient history, real or fictional, to dinner, who would they be?

Can I not have a massive dinner table, like in the grand dining hall of Hogwarts? No? Fine, fine. I choose Sappho, Medea, and Helene. Let the festivities begin!