

**Vassilis Lambropoulos**  
**"Modern Greek Studies in a Large Public Research University"**

**(Presentation in the panel "Weathering the Storm?: The Institutional and Intellectual Challenges of Modern Greek Studies in the 21st Century," 9 November 2019)**

Modern Greek Studies emerged as a field with academic legitimacy in the early 1980s. The scholars who established the MGSA in 1968 had personal and scholarly interests in Greece but no concept of Modern Greek Studies. They were not trained in Modern Greek and importantly they did not train any successors. Furthermore, they had no interest in working with the Greek American community, let alone learning about it.

Thus, those of us who arrived in the field in the early 1980s had to invent, establish, and legitimize MGS from scratch, starting with courses in language and literature, and introducing the first degrees. Ohio State was a successful experiment in that direction. 15 years later, the field faced a crisis in the broader context of the critique of Eurocentrism, the phallogocentric canon, and the supremacy of literature. The language and literature model was losing ground (together with Area Studies). To discuss these issues, we at Ohio State convened (1996) and published (1997) the workshop "Whither the Neohellenic?" As the title indicates, at stake was the very identity of the field.

Soon afterwards (1999), Artemis Leontis & I left Ohio State for Michigan, where we put into action many of the lessons from that workshop. I have been asked to take a look today at the Michigan experiment and summarize its success with an eye to current academic challenges. Some 20 years later we are facing not an internal crisis (a self-critique) but an external one, an attack on the Humanities, both from the campus administration and from socio-political conservatives, that threatens some of its most

important resources. I will list 15 basic things that have helped the MG Program at the U of M to prosper.

1. University commitment serious enough to establish a professorship
2. Professorship endowed in 3 years and upgraded to Chair
3. Matching of campus and community resources
4. Broad-based community involvement (with no single major donor)
5. Chair shared by Classics & Comp Lit with MG embedded in both Depts.
6. Lecturer, unionized and with long-term contract, participating in curricular development
7. Respectable to excellent enrollments with students from several constituencies
8. Campus visibility & distinct identity of MG through interesting academic & cultural events
9. Collaborative projects (inside university and in community) generating allies/supporters
10. Interdisciplinary profile (intersecting w/ other fields) indicates openness & flexibility
11. Research productivity in various areas (publications, conferences, panels etc.)
12. Cutting-edge scholarship showing how the academic subaltern speaks
13. Strong internet presence via active website, FB, blogging
14. Preparing for continuity and succession
15. Well-placed Ph.D.s in Comp Lit, Near Eastern, Linguistics, Ethnomusicology, etc.