PRONUNCIATION

There are four major families of Latin pronunciation:
1) The Classical Pronunciation is the result of attempts in modern times to reconstruct how the Romans themselves pronounced Latin. The primary advantages of this pronunciation are 1) that it is highly consistent and therfore easy to learn, and 2) that it works extremely well for reciting Roman poetry, which was based on syllable length rather than accent.

2) The Ecclesiastical Pronunciation is how Latin is currently recited and sung in the Christian Church. Its current form has resulted from almost two millenia of people speaking and singing Latin and the changes in pronunciation that naturally occur over time. The Ecclesiastical pronunciation is more complicated and more difficult to learn; however, it is a beautiful pronunciation, and its use in Church music makes it highly important today.

3) The Continental Pronunciation is how Latin is commonly pronounced in the scientific community. It is not typically used when reading Latin literature, but it is the preferred pronunciation for technical Latin terms still used in the sciences.

4) The English Pronunciaiton is essentially pronouncing Latin as if it were English. No one reads Latin literature this way, but it is appropriate in legal Latin (e.g., *habeas corpus*) and in the context of English literature, such as Shakespeare.

Each is correct in a particular context. For those interested in reading Latin literature, both Classical and Ecclesiastic are appropriate. However, because it is both easier and more universally applicable, this course will use the Classical Pronunciation. Nevertheless, students already adept at the Ecclesiastical pronunciation from experience with choir should feel no burden to change their pronunciation. Both pronunciations are acceptable.

Classical Pronunciation

Learning to pronounce Latin is rendered much easier for English speakers by the fact that English uses the Latin alphabet. However, the sounds associated with some of these letters are quite different in modern English from those in Latin. Thus, it is necessary to relearn the sounds of the alphabet for Latin. Thankfully, there is largely a one-to-one correspondence between Latin letters and their sounds.

Consonants
The following letters or combinations of letters should (more or less) be pronounced as they are in English: *b*, *d*, *f*, *k*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *p*, *qu*, *t*, *z*.

Many letters that in English may be pronounced in a number of ways are pronounced only one way in Latin:

c is always hard like *k* in English.
g is always hard like *g* in the word "god".
h is a rough breath like in English but more subtle. In some words, such as *harena*, it is frequently left out: *arena*.
r is always soft and slightly trilled (if possible). If you cannot trill an *r*, just do your best.
s is like in "snake" in English and never *sh*; the purists also insist that it should never be voiced to make a *z* sound, but it happens naturally in some words.
x is always pronounced *ks*, never *z*.

The Semivowels *i* and *u*

i and *u* are the most complicated letters in Latin. For the Romans, these letters acted as either vowels and consonants, depending on where they occured in a word. During the Middle Ages, innovative monks invented the letter *j* to replace *i* whenever it was acting as a consonant; likewise, they created the letter *v* to replace the *u*whenever it was acting as a consonant. Some Latin texts use the Medieval letters even today; some (like most anything printed by Oxford University Press) prefer to do it the old Roman way without *j* and *v*; oddly, the most common practice is to dismiss with the Medieval *j* but retain the Medieval *v*. So this will be the practice in this course.

i or *j* (as a consonant) is pronounced like *y* in English. For example, in Latin "Jehova" begins with an *i*: *Iehova*, and it is pronounced "Yehova". In some later texts, it may be spelled "Jehova", but it is still pronunced "Yehova".

u or *v* (as a consonant) theoretically was pronounced like a *w* in early Latin. However, there is strong evidence that by the mid-first century BC this letter was pronounced as something linguists call a voiced bilabial fricative: that is, like an English *v* but with both lips together instead of the upper teeth resting on the lower lip. The symbol for this sound is β. If you practice making this sound, you'll find that it tends to be a middle ground between *w*, *v*, and *b*. Within a few centuries, the β, which is fairly difficult, morphed into a *v* sound. Some users of the Classical Pronunciation are religious about pronouncing this letter as a strong *w* sound, as this pronunciation was probably closest to the original; others believe that the late first century BC and the first century AD provide a better model for pronunciation, as that was when the greatest Roman poets flourished, and pronounce it as β accordingly; still others find the *w* obnoxious but the β too difficult simply pronounce it as *v*. Each is a historically valid reconstruction of the letter: it just depends on which century of the Roman civilization is the basis for the reconstruction. Choose whichever one you like. As for me, I attempt to pronounce it as β but when speaking quickly tend to pronounce it as a *v*.

Vowels

Vowels in Latin may either be short or long: short vowels are almost always left unmarked: *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, *u*, *y*; long vowels are marked with a macron in many modern textbooks designed for students: *ā*, *ā*, *ī*, *ō*, *ū*, and *y*. Long vowels are pronounced about 50% longer than a short vowel. Short and long vowels are almost entirely a matter of pronunciation. However, every once in a while the difference between a short and vowel can have a significant effect on meaning. In these few places, this course marks a vowel with a macron; otherwise, they are omitted.

The short versions of the Latin vowels work as follows:

a is pronounced like the *o* in "cot".
e is pronounced like the *e* in "set"; however, some people pronounce this like *ey* in "whey". Either is acceptable.
i is pronounced like the *i* in "sit"; however, some people pronounce this like *ee* in "feet". Either way is acceptable.
o is pronounced like the *oa* in "boat".
u is pronounced like the *oo* in "food".
y is a sound that English speakers do not make. To find it, begin with an *ee* sound and slowly shift to an *oo* sound. The proper *y* sound is halfway between.

The long versions of the Latin vowels sound like same (but longer) with the following exceptions:

ī is always pronounced *ee* as in "feet". *ī* is always pronounced *ey* as in "whey".

Combinations of Vowels and Consonants

Most of the time when two vowels occur side by side, each is pronounced separately. However, there are a few exceptions:

ae is pronounced like *ie* in "pie".
au is pronounced like *ow* in "how".
ei is often pronounced like *ey* in "whey".
ui is often ponounced like "wee"
eu is pronounced like *ew* in "pew".

Some Latin consonant combinations are an attempt to approximate Greek letters:

ch is a transliteration of χ and should be pronounced as a breathy *k*.
th is a transliteration of θ and should be pronounced as a breathy *t*.
ph is a transliteration of φ and should be pronounced as a breathy *p*; however, many find this sound difficult to make without making an *f* sound. I tend to pronounce it as an *f*. Either pronunciation is acceptable.

Accentuation
In English, the accent or stress of a word usually occurs on the last syllable (pro-CEED), second-to-last syllable (pro-CES-sion), or third-to-last syllable (PRO-ces-sor). In Latin, two-syllable words have their accent on the first syllable almost without exception: *CUL-ter*, *U-va*, *CA-ro*. Words with three or more syllables may have the accent on the second-to-last or third-to-last syllable: *pu-EL-la* and *ex-EMP-lum*, but *PO-cu-lum* and *CA-se-us*. There is a rule to determine whether the accent is on the second- or third-to-last syllable, but it somewhat complicated and it is better for beginners to learn by example. This course will have recordings of each new word, so it will not be a problem.

Conclusion
As you can see, Latin pronunciation varies considerably even within the pale of Classical Pronunciation. Some may see this variation as problematic, but in reality it is trivial compared to the variation found in modern languages today. There are dozens of different dialects within many languages today and even more regional accents. If you were able to listen to people speaking English two hundred years ago, you would find the differences even more stark. Pronouncing Latin words aloud is important because it aids the memory and it is often important to talk about Latin words with others, so pick a pronunciation and try to be consistent. But whatever your preference, do not become a pronunciation bigot. Not even experts on Latin are consistent in how they pronounce Latin. Nevertheless, even today there is a thriving international community of Latin speakers who meet at conventions to speak Latin with each other. Their differences in pronunciation cause no more problem than the differences between British, American, and Australian English would cause at an international academic conference. That said, take pride in your chosen pronunciation and try to make it sound good.