

Sample Student Evaluations for José Vergara
Russian 037: Crime or Punishment – Narratives of Incarceration and Captivity
Swarthmore College
Spring 2019

“I hadn’t taken a class on literature since high school, so it was a very learning experience for me to break apart the specific language that was being used in the texts. I also was able to learn a lot more about Russian society and what people were experiencing during the Stalin regime, and what people are still experiencing. I think it was interesting that this class was formed around the general idea of incarceration itself, as it left a lot of room to explore the system itself, as well as why we form the penal system in the current way, and how it is in the US and Russia.”

“The structure of class is always very engaging -- it never feels boring or repetitive. I’m always interested in what is being said and excited to contribute.”

“Learning about Pussy Riot was an interesting experience and showed us how protest is both chaotic and structured as the protesters are the idea. Also, our trip to Long Island to visit the Kabakovs (Russian artists) was amazing and taught me how artwork is global in spreading protest and knowledge of how small our world is.”

“Victoria Lomasko - and getting to hear her speak on campus - was wonderful.”

“I learned a lot about Russian history as well as read Gulag memoirs that I would have not before this class. I think all the stories, philosophical papers, and articles helped me understand the prison system and Russian culture better.”

“I’m taking an inside out class, so having Russian cross-cultural comparison is really cool and helpful.”

“I really enjoyed our discussions about why these texts matter, and how they are applicable today. I feel that I have learned a lot about not only Russian history and culture, but also about how the flaws of Russian culture are reflected in the flaws of American culture.”

“The look I got into Russian history and Russian culture was incredible.”

“[I learned] how to [better] analyze complicated literature.”

“I learned a tremendous amount about Russian history and incarceration (obviously). I was especially interested in the patterns we saw around human adaptability, the meaning of life, and good/evil.”

“Professor José Vergara is an understanding, transparent, and fun instructor who truly loves teaching Russian culture and literature. Additionally, he’s a supportable professor and loves to speak upon his courses, but also other topics to better bond with his students. Also, he shared heavily edited drafts from one of his ongoing scholarly articles to show that writing is meant to be revised and we aren’t terrible students if our papers get heavily edited/revised.”

“Definitely keep Professor Vergara on as long as y’all can – he’s the best.”

“This was a thoroughly enjoyable semester. Thank you!”

“I loved this class! Thanks!”

“This course has been fascinating and thoroughly enjoyable. It made me look at human interaction differently. “

“I really enjoyed learning from Professor Vergara. He is a very approachable professor and pushed me to be more critical of the opinions that I would state during class, encouraging me to deepen my thoughts and form it more based on text. I did have trouble in the beginning to engage actively in discussion, and he took the form of calling people to speak, which I think was a very good method, because it wasn’t necessarily scary and did not put people on the spot. I do think his questions were thought provoking.”

“This was my favorite class of the semester -- it was structured in a way that forced people to do almost all of the readings (the question-posting was a good idea). Discussions were generally rich.”

“I’ve found that I engage most with the discussions that connect texts to each other and/or modern day situations. I think the connections help form a deeper understanding of both things being linked.”

“There is a lot of reading, but it’s not unreasonable. Other assignments (essays, mapping project, etc.) are given plenty of introduction and are divided into several smaller steps, which makes them much more manageable.”

“I like that we have to write multiple drafts. Though I do write multiple drafts regularly, I definitely do not space out the drafts as much as this, so it is nice to be able to take the time to look back at the essays.”

“The writing assignments have been fair. The online questions are not hard and a good way to make students engage with the texts.”

“I definitely feel free to express my ideas, and I really appreciate the way everyone listens and responds thoughtfully. It makes contributing to discussion feel worthwhile.”

“The discussion component is great! I think people are for the most part comfortable sharing their ideas and the ideas that are shared always add to the discussion and make me appreciate the text more.”

“Discussion in class is stimulating. Group discussions are also good as I get to hear different perspectives that I may not have even thought of, e.g. comparing the Panopticon’s notion of self-surveillance to the recent privacy scandals.”

“I really appreciate how you respond to everything right. away. It makes me feel like you are paying attention and motivates me to pay close attention, too. You definitely have earned the trust of the class.”

“The Foucault stuff was all very new to me, and I found a lot of his ideas really satisfying. The panopticon, of course, but also the role of "experts" in the criminal justice process.”

“Reading Daly chapters 4 and 5 followed by Chukovskaya and Akhmatova made me finally understand the horrors of the Soviet years (which I already knew were horrible, but only abstractly, and now I know that I didn’t really know before).”

“I think a lot of the aha moments I have had have been when I feel as though I best understood the pain the author was going through. The relationship between Sofia Petrovna and her son, how Sofia Petrovna was proud of her work and was excited to share it with her son was really touching and then the destruction of their relationship was incredibly powerful. The prisoners’ excitement about the play was also special in [Dostoevsky’s] *Dead House*.”