

Teaching Philosophy and Experience Crystal Chemris

Teaching Philosophy

As a teacher of Spanish language and Hispanic literature and of the Humanities, I seek to broaden cultural awareness in my students. I believe in grounding students with a sense of period and genre, as well as with a sense of aesthetic and historical specificity. I also emphasize careful and meticulous reading of literary texts. I seek to inspire students' creativity and initiative, combining lecture, group work and conference teaching styles as the material and student needs dictate. I incorporate art, film and performance into literature and language courses where appropriate. In a country that expects the rest of the world to learn English, teaching Spanish can play a role in developing a cosmopolitan consciousness, an awareness that we are truly citizens of the world.

Whatever demands I make on students are intended to foster their intellectual and cultural development, and these demands are accompanied with compassion. I emphasize the use of Spanish as a living language. I believe in treating students as unique individuals and in being accessible while maintaining professional decorum. I aim to address the special concerns of minority and women students and the needs of heritage speakers. I believe students with language acquisition learning disabilities should be given the opportunity to take alternative courses in foreign culture and linguistics. In the end, I believe a fine teacher needs to behave as a compassionate and ethical human being, demonstrating a concern for social justice.

Teaching Experience

I have experience teaching Hispanic literature, Hispanic cultural history, literary theory, Humanities and Spanish language classes in a variety of institutions, from state research universities to the small liberal arts college. A sampling of my experience reveals my breadth and versatility as a teacher.

At the University of Missouri I offered a comprehensive course in Golden Age poetry open to both undergraduate and graduate students, including additional work with the graduates on some of the more difficult lyric poems to help them prepare required material for their doctoral exams. The course covered Renaissance, Mystical and Baroque poetry, including major works such as Góngora's *Soledades* and *Polifemo* and the Colonial Poet Sor Juana's *Primero sueño*; this course served as a foundation for my Renaissance and Golden Age literature course at the University of Iowa, where I included the picaresque novel and a sample of the *comedia* as well. At Southern Oregon University, I offered a transatlantic version of this course, analyzing Spanish Golden Age Literature in the context of its "colonial other" by including a component of history and culture as well as of colonial and indigenous literature. At Miami University I taught Spanish Cultural History (18-20th centuries) through literature and cultural studies.

While at Reed College, I had the opportunity to teach a number of courses in Hispanic literature as well as to participate on senior theses boards. Teaching at Reed is based on the

conference model; often classes are organized around student presentations like a graduate seminar. Senior theses are developed like a mini-PhD, with qualifying oral exams and a rigorous defense before a committee of the faculty. I was a reader on theses in literature (on translation theory and on Cervantes' *Don Quijote*) as well as an outside reader for theses in other divisions (the German Märchen and theory, a creative thesis in Poetry, an Anthropology thesis on voodoo using postcolonial theory and structuralism, an English department thesis on Virginia Woolf, etc.)

My courses at Reed included the "Theory and Practice of Hispanic Literature" course, in which works of theory (Foucault, Bakhtin, etc.) were applied to representative works of Hispanic genres such as *testimonio*, magical realism or elegiac poetry. It was my task to spark the students into discussion about theory and close readings of primary texts in their first course in Hispanic literature and to guide them in weekly and final research papers; as class participation and writing assignments were in Spanish, while theoretical texts were supplied in English, this course presented some unusual teaching challenges. Topics I helped my students to develop for their papers included narrative structure in Pedro Páramo (focusing on the frustration of teleology and the failure of the Mexican revolution, women figures, indigenous vs. Christian spiritual beliefs, or in one case, fractal theory), *testimonio* theory, and the revolutionary cinema of Gutiérrez Alea.

I also taught courses on Peninsular as well as Latin American Poetry; in each I included a performance and creative writing component, as well as, where applicable, the study of the interaction of poetry with the visual arts, theatre or film. In the Peninsular class (a repeat of a course I gave at the University of Pittsburgh) I introduced and closed the course with popular poetry, both primitive and modern examples of the *cancionero tradicional*. I had the students write imitations of traditional *cancionero* poetry as a device to show they had incorporated an understanding of the form. I also arranged for the class to attend a performance of Latino playwright Nilo Cruz's play "Lorca in a Green Dress" produced by a local Latino theatre company and showed them film clips in class of Dalí's famous dream sequence from Hitchcock's "Spellbound" for discussion of Lorca's "Romance Sonámbulo". This combination of teaching strategies led to some interesting papers, which included a study of Lorca's "Romance sonámbulo" and the interaction of popular poetry, flamenco and *cante jondo* performance with vanguardist poetics, a paper on Spanish educational reform as seen in Machado's poem "Recuerdo infantil" and Vallejo's "España, aparta de mí este cáliz" using Jo Libanyi's *Spanish Cultural Studies Reader* as a source on the Republican literacy campaign, and a paper on the relationship between the above-cited Vallejo poem and Cubism. The course also included a healthy sampling of the classics of Golden age poetry.

In the Latin American poetry class, my focus was on the relationship between vanguardist poetry and alterity (the poetry of the female, Afro-Hispanic, indigenous, gay and lesbian, and U.S. Latino experience). Students produced an original ode in the style of Neruda and, as in all my poetry classes, gave an oral presentation, produced a research paper, and participated in a final poetry reading. Some of the more interesting paper topics included a comparative study of Latin American poems of solidarity with the Spanish Republic and an exploration of the problem of subaltern voice in contemporary indigenous poetry. In my second semester of teaching this course, I brought the students to Portland's Teatro Milagro production of Skármeta's play on Neruda (the source for the film, *Il Postino*), presented in Spanish with English supertitles. The

experience of teaching this course allowed me to develop some of my most interesting research in the area of the trajectory of the Spanish peninsular Baroque into the Latin American modern. I continued to teach this course at the University of Iowa and Southern Oregon University.

I taught two full year courses in Spanish language as well, and I approached these as an experienced teacher-scholar who knows how to guide students through language into the full range of introductory and advanced literature courses. In the second year course I worked to organize a successful poetry recital by the Argentine poet Noni Benegas, guiding the students through vocabulary and questions on pre-assigned texts before the reading and advising our speaker on tailoring her presentation to the needs of intermediate students. I have taught many sections of third year courses in composition, conversation, civilization and introduction to literature at various institutions. I have been trained in advising and have fulfilled my responsibilities in that area too.

Having taught the modern period in the Humanities program in Missouri, I am also able to offer courses in general studies or Hispanic literature in translation outside the Spanish department. In addition to my graduate teaching, I have served on master's exam evaluations, the graduate admissions committee, a Golden Age search committee and the library committee, thus demonstrating an ability to contribute in areas of service.