

Sample Student Evaluations for José Vergara
Russian 043: Chernobyl – Nuclear Narratives and the Environment
Swarthmore College
Spring 2020

“Vergara is one of the best professors I've had in my 4 years, and I cannot recommend him enough.

In any of his courses, the curriculum is always super well thought out, the readings are thought-provoking, and the way he structures discussions/homework really allows you to engage with the texts as well as linking them to broader issues and/or personal experience. He's a fair but not easy grader and he expects you to put in the work, but he's also pretty reasonable when it comes to asking for extensions or making up assignments/extra credit. Honestly 10/10, most unflappable human being on the planet. He makes a point of checking in on what students are doing outside of his class, and always follows up on the important things happening in our lives. I have found in him a kind and understanding ear to listen. He is an excellent resource for extra reading and research, and always encourages us to explore perspectives and areas that captivate our interest. Being able to do so for credit in the creative portion of this class is an added bonus. Thank you, Professor Vergara, for an incredible 2 1/2 years. Желаю Вам всего наилучшего, and I hope you will stay with the Russian department for a long time to come.”

“I am not exaggerating when I say that Professor Vergara is the best instructor I've had the privilege to learn from at Swarthmore. He actively listens to the ideas of students and fosters a discussion environment in which everyone feels comfortable sharing their ideas. I very much appreciate how he works to make complex ideas and texts accessible to all while teaching students to defend their ideas both orally and in writing. I looked forward to every class discussion, even after we transitioned to Zoom. He is not a complacent instructor, but instead constantly seeks innovative ways to reach students. While he has very high expectations for students, he is never unreasonable and always provides as much support as possible inside and outside of the classroom. He is extraordinarily patient and compassionate with students regardless of the circumstances, which decreases barriers to participation and improves the classroom environment as a whole. He represents the best of academia and higher education through his remarkable scholarly generosity and intellectual humility with

none of the pretense or elitism. I am inspired by his profound and unrelenting curiosity and belief in the power of language and discussion to facilitate change. I also served as the TA for this class while simultaneously being enrolled in it as a student, and I want to thank Professor Vergara for taking so much of his own time to teach me about how he approaches class discussions, lesson planning, and academic work in general. From being his student and TA, I have learned that Professor Vergara puts a substantial amount of effort into employing a variety of pedagogical techniques and activities in the classroom that resonate with students of all learning styles. While I have always loved writing and reading on my own, Professor Vergara challenged me to look for ways to connect my interests in the humanities to projects that resonate with broader audiences. Although I am very shy and introverted, Professor Vergara's incredible patience and continual invitations to share my ideas made me much more confident as a student and person. Thanks to the influence of Professor Vergara's mentorship, instruction, and support, I hope to pursue a PhD and become a professor someday. If and when I do become a professor, I will try to follow Professor Vergara's example by creating space for the voices of all students and helping them to develop a sense of personal responsibility for engaging with our collective problems through literature and scholarship. Thank you to Swarthmore for employing outstanding instructors like Professor Vergara."

"I love the diversity of experiences and perspectives we looked at, as it offered a comprehensive, arguably objective view of Chernobyl that simply watching the HBO series or reading only Russian texts couldn't have provided. The non-human perspectives - plants, animals - were particularly interesting, and sparked some truly insightful discussions."

"The different sections of the course helped me stay engaged with the content. Having a new way to learn about Chernobyl each week kept my motivation high. Examples are video games, film screenings, and online Q&A's."

"I found fishbowl discussions in class to be very engaging in that it somewhat gently forced those who were not keen on sharing their insights to be put on the limelight, broadening my understanding on the subject matter as a whole."

"I think that the discussion format was often very engaging and the professor kept conversations moving. This kept class interesting and made all of the readings feel more connected."

“The aspect of the course I found most useful and engaging were when we would initially break into small groups to discuss a reading or film before joining as a whole class to discuss. This allowed me to see how other people interpreted the assignment, giving me a better understanding of each piece of literature. Also, the discussion questions or posts due before class helped to organize my thoughts before class so I knew what I wanted to talk about or what points I wanted to make before in-class discussion even began.”

“I really appreciated the varied discussion formats and interactivity of the work we did in class! It had me thinking in a lot of ways I don't know that I would have if it had been a basic style of discussion every day. I was also really engaged in the small group work we did, even on Zoom—I liked being able to consider things more in depth with only a few people and then bringing a solid synthesis back to the main group for further discussion.”

“The class discussions and having other teachers visit the class for special presentations. It was valuable to me to hear other students' new perspectives and the outside professors/specialists were insightful in their lessons.”

“Working in small groups was excellent. Discussing readings was also very stimulating.”

“The strong emphasis on an open discourse surrounding our opinions on Chernobyl and the various aspects of the disaster. I enjoyed how well structured every class was.”

“Since we were all able to choose a Chernobyl topic of our own [for the installation project], I think it motivated us more into learning about Chernobyl and informing others.”

“1) The in-class discussions were definitely my favorite part of the class. They provided me with the opportunity to situate my own ideas in relation to everyone else's. The varied and thoughtful activities enabled me to practice speaking, thinking, and writing in new ways. 2) I also loved the installation project. I think that it's very important to practice public-facing writing, and this project helped me to more fully appreciate and believe in the centrality and relevance of the humanities as a discipline. 3) I loved the near-weekly submission of discussion questions. By composing questions, I enhanced my own understanding of the material while also learning how to distill and articulate the topics that interested me in order to engage the class as a whole. In short, I loved this class, and I feel that it has provided me with an important set of analytical and conceptual tools that will serve me well in the future.”

“I liked the writing projects a lot because the assignments were broad, unique, and thought-provoking, and each lent itself to a different form of expression, audience, and content.”

“Casual, free-speaking discussions were consistently interesting and helpful throughout the course - fishbowl style discussion was stressful but actually really cool.”

“Just as a baseline, I think the subject matter of the course was highly engaging. I also appreciated the variety of materials we looked at (written texts, television, documentary, video games...).”

“I thought that the field trip [to the Limerick Nuclear Generating Station] was really interesting as an indicator of the current atmosphere at nuclear power plants and the idea of infallibility that still pervades them.”

“The discussion questions we were presented were very engaging and great at fostering discussion. I also enjoyed the selection of readings and films, they presented a very diverse view of Chernobyl that really helped build the narrative.”

“This question assumes that there was an aspect of the course that wasn’t useful or engaging, which there wasn’t.”

“For me, there was not a lot in the course that I did not find useful or engaging, mostly due to how interesting I thought the material was. Each aspect, whether it be the theme of a collection of texts we read or how the course in general was structured helped fill in the gaps people were missing, as everyone in the class had different ideas and background knowledge of what Chernobyl was. What was least engaging for me was information about background I already knew, however where I had knowledge in one area of the course, others were previously informed in other areas making so I understood the reasoning behind it.”

“Honestly, all of the course was engaging. Even if I did not particularly enjoy certain texts, I recognized that it was valuable to read them in conversation with other works so as to complicate and improve our collective understanding of Chernobyl.”

“I honestly don’t really have any critiques. I have really enjoyed this class, the readings (even if some more than others), and the conversations that arose.”

“Kudos to Professor Vergara for coming up with a highly effective means of continuing to participate in class and complete assignments/engage with the material after transitioning to online learning (i.e. the asynchronous option).”

“The spacing of assignments was good, all things considered! I do feel accomplished with achieving the goals and level of the course.”

“I thought the level of the main assignments was appropriate as well as the difficulty. The three main assignments were all interesting and the expectations for posting questions and responses to the reading was good.”

“I thought the structure of the course was very good in terms of spacing and number of assignments for a general survey course. While at times the amount of reading or watching TV seemed like a lot, it was all manageable and beneficial in forming a proper narrative, making it well worth it. I also loved how the course flowed throughout the semester, being able to make connections back to previous readings as we continued to gain a better understanding of what happened, the impact it had, and how different people interpreted it.”

“The course was very well-structured both in terms of the reading load and the distribution/type of assignments. I think that the amount of reading allowed for meaningful engagement with the material without overwhelming students. I loved how the writing assignments had multiple stages that allowed for students to obtain feedback from a variety of people (professor, peers, WAs). I think that the number of assignments was appropriate to the goals and level of the course. The spacing between assignments and drafts provided students with the necessary time to complete meaningful revisions.”

“I really liked the varied forms of media we engaged with. I don't think the material was too hard or too much, and I honestly loved the texts so much I wanted more.”

“I think that the structure and workload were both appropriate for this course. It definitely wasn't always easy, and we often had to read quite a bit in a short amount of time, but I think that all of the reading was valuable in some way in contributing to our understanding and analysis of Chernobyl.”

“Professor Vergara offers some of the most thoughtful and detailed feedback I've ever gotten from a professor on my writing. The more informal questions/responses allowed me to present thoughts and ideas in a less structured way, and it was useful to then have those fuel the in-class discussions, which helped to solidify these thoughts/ideas into theses for papers/projects.”

“The installation project was amazing to do, seeing how I turned my childhood games into an informative piece on pop culture and disaster.”

“In general, I felt that the writing assignments like the question/responses were effective in garnering discourse on the readings and promote engagement with the text.”

“I think that the writing assignments were good. This was my first time with a WA [Writing Center Associate] and it went great, and I thought the freedom on the assignments was great because I wrote about things that I found interesting.”

“The installation project and the creative/grant proposal assignments were both engaging and cool. I found that how interesting the assignments were made it easier to have fun while doing them and not get burned out.”

“I did really enjoy the activities where we wrote on the whiteboards around the classroom. It allowed us all to see each other’s ideas, and allowed for more open sharing than discussions do. With small group discussions, we’re pretty comfortable talking but only hear the ideas of our groups, and with full class discussions, it can be intimidating to share a thought or question if we aren’t confident in it. Whiteboard writing is the best of both worlds.”

“I think the variety of writing assignments was beneficial in keeping the course from potentially getting repetitive. The online questions/responses helped to organize my thoughts before class so I came in with a plan. The essay allowed me to pick specifics from the literature I wanted to analyze, and the open-ended nature of it really helped. The installation project allowed me to choose something I really found interesting and figure out how I would want it presented to a general audience. Finally, the creative/grant proposal will allow me to apply what I’ve learned about the writing process in general to create a new story or something I could potentially use for a real proposal down the line. I think this variety is much more beneficial than a standard course where you just have X number of essays throughout the semester.”

“I think the online questions in particular were very helpful to my learning in this class because they clarified some smaller issues that then didn’t take up class time or didn’t leave me confused without a chance for clarification, and the discussion questions really made me think critically about the texts and media I was consuming, in a way that I tend not to do without prompting—the responses were also good for this, and really made me evaluate my own

biases in several cases, which I also found particularly helpful. I really also appreciated the opportunities for feedback in general, and found the peer review and also Professor Vergara's commentary on the writing assignments very insightful and beneficial to improving my writing."

"All of the writing assignments have been engaging and productive. I especially liked that the course built WA consultations into its syllabus."

"The amount of time and help we received with every assignment was incredibly helpful and prevented the course from feeling overwhelming."

"Writing online questions and responses were two of my favorite activities in the course, because they enabled me to guide my reading and inform my contributions to class discussion. I thought that the essay was manageable and deepened my engagement with the texts we discussed in class. The installation project was one of the aspects of this class that I was most excited about, because it gave me the opportunity to practice writing for a public audience. While I am still working on the creative project, I am grateful to have the opportunity to reflect critically on whether and how catastrophes like Chernobyl can be represented through fiction. The peer review and WA consultations helped to scaffold the writing process and challenged me to express my ideas as clearly as possible. Again, Professor Vergara's feedback was exceptionally useful at all stages of the writing process for these assignments."

"I loved all of the writing in this course. It was diverse in form and content, often tied to visuals or another form of media, and consisted of lots of helpful feedback."

"The first essay was nice and open-ended, with reliable WAs and helpful feedback from the professor. In-class writing was very short and infrequent as to allow more discussion."

"I thought that there were tons of resources available, and that Professor Vergara was always available for help which was very useful."

"I personally really liked the writing assignments for this class. I think that a lot of the online questions and responses prompted more in-depth thinking about many different topics. I found the WA consultations very helpful. Something that I really appreciated about the larger assignments for this class was the fact that the assignments were so open, and we could basically write about/research whatever we wanted in relation to Chernobyl."

“I thought the online question / response format was pretty fair and helped consolidate thoughts prior to class. I also appreciated that you gave feedback on each one — I could tell you really cared about my perspective and interpretations.”

“Swatties are some of the most stimulating discussion partners to have, and this class was no exception. While class was still being held in person, the activities where we walked around to different whiteboards and put down/added to discussion points were particularly helpful; I think having that physical movement helped me to refresh my thoughts and contribute more meaningfully to the discussion.”

“I felt as though Professor Vergara created a very safe and open environment for those to share their ideas and pushed us to challenge our own beliefs, in a respectful way. He found ways to encourage those that struggled to express ourselves and always made sure to gently remind those that took a back seat.”

“I really enjoyed the variety of formats and activities we did in class and felt I could express my own ideas without criticism. I think the classroom atmosphere helped in that it established the idea that everyone interprets the literature differently, and that at the end of the class everyone will have their own unique narrative of Chernobyl.”

“I really enjoyed the varied discussion methods and I felt I had a lot of good opportunities to share my ideas and collaborate and work with others. Overall, I definitely felt encouraged to share and learn from my peers, and the classroom environment was very conducive to this.”

“Another way to encourage discussion that I thought this class did well was ice breakers for the first few classes so we all get to know each other better.”

“The pre-discussion questions given to us were a great way for me to think about certain ideas and expand on them. When it was in-person, I enjoyed we had different forms of discussion, such as the one-on-ones, writing on the board, or debates.”

“I really appreciated the incorporation of a variety of different activities into class discussion. Professor Vergara ensured that quiet students had the opportunity to participate through in-class writing activities and small-group discussions. I really loved the close-reading exercises that we did in the first half of the semester, when we would annotate scenes of movies and excerpts from texts displayed through the projector. I felt like the large-group discussions were always well-structured and built upon the ideas that students had already discussed in

previous activities without being repetitive. The classroom atmosphere was supportive and nonjudgemental. If students were not fully engaged on a particular day, Professor Vergara would patiently adapt the discussion accordingly by rephrasing questions and introducing alternative activities. Even after we moved online, Professor Vergara utilized the available technology to its full potential by doing in-class collaborative and individual writing exercises on Google Docs; hosting break-out rooms; and guiding large-group discussions.”

“I liked that we were able to engage one-on-one with everyone in the class. This format allowed me to drop my barriers and express my opinions freely to all of my classmates. I also liked the variety of activities, especially during the first half of the semester, as they helped me engage with the materials in unique and thought-provoking ways.”

“I thought the classroom atmosphere was pretty relaxed and engaging - quieter students were encouraged to speak up without being too forced or put on the spot. Discussion format ranged from whole-class circles to several large groups to partners to a weird fishbowl thing and so on. There was also writing on whiteboards, drawing on paper, and stating your opinion on a topic by standing on one side of the room or the other.”

“I don’t know if any other students were uncomfortable with it, but I thought the fishbowl activity was a really good form of discussion. Obviously we couldn’t do that on Zoom, but I would consider using it again in future (in-person) classes.”

“I think that the discussions were very good, obviously better in person but still better on Zoom than most of my other classes.”

“I am generally a very anxious person when it comes to expressing my ideas and opinions, but I earnestly felt like this class fostered an environment where I felt safe and comfortable discussing different ideas with a group. Maybe it’s because this class is smaller than most of my other ones, but I really felt like I had the opportunity to connect with my peers which I really appreciate. I also think that it was very good that we were encouraged to express our ideas in different ways (written, oral, etc.).”

“I thought there was really creative aspects of class which made it feel more like a 50 minute class than 75. I liked the wagon wheel and 4 person inside circle thingy.”

“Professor Vergara is by far the most organized and structured professor I’ve ever met, and I always knew exactly what was expected of me, and, on the rare occasions that I didn’t, he was quick to clarify when asked.”

“Feedback was GREAT. Professor, WA, and Peer feedback helped me revisit my writing and correct my arguments. It was constructive as they did attempt to understand my writing and often ways to improve/organize it, rather than completely stop after reading to a certain point.”

“[Feedback] was honest and focused on pointing me towards improvements and solutions to problems, not just telling me which areas weren’t good enough.”

“The feedback I received from Professor Vergara, my peer reviewer, and my WA was all very constructive and helped guide me in the revision process to further organize my thoughts and improve my writing. On top of this the guidelines for each assignment were very clear and explicit on how I would be evaluated, and what was required.”

“I think that the feedback was very helpful and constructive, as I mentioned previously, and the manner in which it was provided was just fine, and probably the best way to do it anyway. As for evaluation, I think it was about as clear as it could be without a written out rubric, and Professor Vergara was very communicative about what all went into the grade for each assignment.”

“All very clear - some of the best I’ve seen at my time at Swarthmore and I truly appreciated the timelines and thorough-ness of the feedback.”

“Feedback I received for my drafts and installation project has been tremendously helpful. I think the means of how it was provided was great. The rubric is clear too.”

“Professor Vergara’s feedback was extremely constructive, clear, and specific. Out of all of my professors I’ve had at Swarthmore, I feel like Professor Vergara is the most detail-oriented in his feedback, but he is also very good at asking thought-provoking questions that provoke deeper analysis. He always provided very clear guidelines in advance of all assignments, and I really appreciated how he emphasized that revision is an ongoing process that doesn’t end simply because one turns in a draft. He was also always willing to meet at any stage of the writing/brainstorming process, which was very helpful. Thanks to Professor Vergara’s thoughtful feedback, I feel that I became a much more articulate writer and feel more comfortable sharing my ideas with others.”

“The feedback I received for my writing was great! I feel like my writing and my confidence in my writing has improved that semester quite a bit, largely due to comprehensive and constructive feedback.”

“Professor Vergara was always on top of responding to emails and getting back to us in a timely manner, sometimes being up at ungodly hours like us.”

“I don't think I ever had to wait more than 30 minutes for feedback on emails, and more than a day or two on a polished draft allowing me to continue on with my writing with ease and no delay. I really appreciated how easily accessible Professor Vergara was at providing feedback and answering questions.”

“Professor Vergara's feedback and responses to emails were always unbelievably prompt and thorough. I feel like he went out of his way to facilitate communication, and he always responded compassionately and thoughtfully to any questions that people expressed.”

“Yes!! Professor Vergara's prompt responses saved me on quite a few occasions.”

“Professor Vergara's leadership and instruction. The curriculum he put together, combined with the class structure, made for an amazing learning experience.”

“[My success in the course] probably links back to the engagement of the instructor with the class. His enthusiasm and clear understanding of the material along with the desire to promote discourse definitely helped me thrive.”

“I would say that what contributed most to my success in this course was the ease of access to help and resources if we needed them. Emails asking for help were answered in an appropriate amount of time, and well. I also appreciate how aware we were made of library research assistants, WAs, and other resources on campus to assist us.”

“The atmosphere Professor Vergara created for us definitely helped me succeed the most. He was also very understanding when I ran into complications, and the assistance he provided allowed me to focus on my work and still do a good job on these assignments while remaining as stress-free as possible.”

“‘The Zero Meter Diving Team,’ for all that it has its own issues, provided a strange and interesting contrast to, say, *Voices [from Chernobyl]*. That was the moment I realized that the way in which language breaks down around the Chernobyl disaster - and, subsequently, the ways in

which we use language to try and fill or circumnavigate the breakdown - are, in a way, symbolized by the radioactive decay. It's just fascinating to think about."

"I would say initially reading *Voices from Chernobyl* was probably one moment that will stick with me for a very long time. Just the vivid description of those involved and the truly gruesome details."

"As the semester progressed I found myself seeing more and more of the connections between different aspects of Chernobyl that I definitely would not have seen before taking the class."

"One moment I grasped a new perspective was when we discussed in class the idea that everyone has their own aspect of Chernobyl they focus on in their own narrative. You discussed how you've noticed different students have their own unique take, and that opened me to the perspective that Chernobyl is such a monumental event that inspired so much literature and media interpretations that it is interesting to everyone for a different reason. Whether it be the conspiracy theories, the cover up, the environment, the media interpretations, or anything else there's truly something for everyone to learn or be invested in Chernobyl about."

"When we were discussing the installation project assignment at one point in class, Professor Vergara mentioned an idea that he had heard about the 'form' of scholarship needing to adequately reflect/serve the 'content' that is featured. In this moment, I realized that academic scholarship needs to be intentionally designed and disseminated so as to be fully accessible and include the broader public in an ongoing dialogue. As I have been struggling with the COVID-19 pandemic and have been attempting to determine whether and how I can respond to it in a productive way, I keep returning to this idea that Professor Vergara shared in the first weeks of class. Academic scholarship needs to be inclusive, responsive, and adaptive, which requires 'us' to identify and conceive of new ways of representing literature, art, and society. This task connects to one of the main topics we addressed in class, which has to do with how catastrophes like Chernobyl that cannot fit into established linguistic/temporal/scientific frameworks demand new forms of storytelling."

"There were lots of mini-"aha" moments for me throughout the course. One that I found particularly important was when we were discussing the idea of Chernobyl as an acceleration, rather than a break. This idea seems applicable to a lot of other events and histories."

“I think that reading *Voices From Chernobyl* at the beginning of the semester was a good idea, because it showed me that Chernobyl is not a monolithic phenomenon, but rather one experienced differently by everyone, which really set the tone for the course from the start.”

“I have had many of these moments throughout this course, but I suppose that a more recent one would be my understanding of guilt and blame. At the beginning of this course, I think that I was much more under the impression that there was a single person/party to blame for this accident. Throughout the class, I think that I have gained a better understanding of the complexities of disasters like Chernobyl. I have also really come to understand just how much different pieces of writing can influence the general public and historians alike to think about something in a certain way, even when a given work is more obviously biased.”

“I’m a psychology major and love thinking about human behavior, so when someone described the relation of the Russian people to their government as a form of Stockholm syndrome, this was definitely an ‘aha’ moment that stuck with me. I felt like I really understood a new perspective in which to understand people living under oppressive governments.”

“The [virtual] movie screenings were fun and fostered a sense of continued community during the pandemic.”

“I think Professor Vergara used zoom quite effectively, manipulating the breakout rooms and coordinating the google doc for class discussions. I thought they were all quite effective. I think out of all my classes, this one definitely adapted the best.”

“I liked the asynchronous option, I didn’t have that in my other classes.”

“The Zoom class sessions were effective, and I was impressed by Professor Vergara’s competence with Zoom. I expected us to waste a lot of time with technical difficulties, but it worked very well.”

“The break out rooms on Zoom were great! I also really enjoyed the collaborative in class activities, and found them really engaging and interesting.”

“I think you did a wonderful transition to on-line learning. There was a lot of clear communication coming from you and students were clear on what will happen and when.”

“Giving the students asynchronous/synchronous options was really helpful! Another class of mine didn’t offer this, or alter their class expectations very much, and I lost engagement with the

class. With this, I felt like I could keep up with the class, and I was able to engage with other students.”

“While I hated moving to remote instruction, I think that Professor Vergara did absolutely everything possible to facilitate this transition and maintain a meaningful experience. The asynchronous and synchronous participation options accounted for the spectrum of personal and academic challenges that students are facing during this unprecedented time. The Perusall/Google Docs asynchronous discussions were highly effective at promoting engagement with the material outside of the classroom while also being flexible enough to not burden students. Professor Vergara also gave students the opportunity to link their experiences in the COVID-19 pandemic to the issues that we discussed in class, which helped students to process and synthesize the ideas of the course. Professor Vergara also shifted deadlines substantially, which enabled most students to participate fully in the course without feeling overwhelmed. I am extremely grateful for RUSS043, which has represented a source of stability from the beginning of the semester through the end.”

“I really liked the online discussions on Perusall because I was able to dive more deeply into some of the texts, think clearly about what I wanted to say, and read the thoughts of all of my classmates in addition to those of 15 other students. All things considered, the transition to remote learning was very smooth.”

“I think that the fact that we had synchronous classes over zoom was very important for my learning. In some of my other classes, lectures have just been posted online for us to watch a few times per week. I felt like I have been much less productive and successful in the classes in which that was the case than in classes with synchronous components.”

“The use of both a synchronous and asynchronous discussion option definitely helped, and the pushing back of due dates and cutting down on requirements was also a big weight lifted off our shoulders. I do not have many extra suggestions for remote instruction and learning, and would like to let my instructor know he did a very effective job in keeping the class engaging.”

“I think that all of the texts included in the course had value and connected clearly to the topics being discussed. I also encountered other kinds of ‘texts’ through this class that pushed me

outside of my comfort zone and made me reflect on Chernobyl in unexpected ways, such as playing the *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* video game and reading the fictional appropriations.”

“It’s been a fun semester full of new experiences, I appreciate Professor Vergara’s spontaneity in responding to the covid crisis and hope to see him in future classes soon.”

“Really enjoyed everything about class to the point it was hard to think of something that wasn't useful or effective. Thank you so much for a great semester, and offering such an interesting class that I would recommend to anyone.”

“The only other thing I have to say is that this was a great course, and I hope it gets offered again for future students!”

“Thank you so much and I hope to see you in person soon! I thoroughly enjoyed taking this class, despite it being intimidating and out of my comfort zone.”

“It was a great class - thanks for teaching it!”

“I think courses like this based on events that are well-known but poorly understood are a really intriguing concept, and I’d love to see more of them. Maybe on the Russian Revolution? Just a thought. Thank you for making this available to non-Russian students!”

“I just wanted to say thank you for an amazing semester. I feel like I have grown a lot as a writer and even as a person in this class, and the content was engaging and, in my opinion, very important. Honestly, during this quarantine with our online classes, our zoom classes were often the highlight(s) of my week. Overall, thank you for a great class and for being a great professor.”

“I really appreciated the time and effort put into this class. Especially with the transition to online learning, you were really flexible in requirements and I think that made me willing to continue putting in effort to get the most out of this class.”

“I really enjoy when we get into small groups to talk about our ideas, and then share our ideas with the class as a whole. I think that it is good that we have time to process our ideas with just a couple of other people before sharing them in a larger setting.”

“I think that the way that in class discussions are run spurs interesting conversation.”

“Fishbowl discussions force me to participate in uncomfortable but ultimately rewarding ways (more on the spot participation and less thought-out comments).”

“I enjoy the varieties of group work we do because it enables us to hear multiple people’s perspectives and ideas on matters. I believe I have pretty much interacted with everyone in the class [extensively], which is not something I can say about most other classes I’ve taken.”

“The diversity of sources for information on Chernobyl have been very valuable - they have given insight into the many different perspectives on the event. Additionally, some of the in-class discussions have been particularly thought-provoking and I especially appreciate the ‘fishbowl’ method we occasionally use, as it lets people voice their thoughts more comfortably and confidently.”

“The aspects of the course I’ve found most useful are the online responses allowing me to gather my thoughts before a discussion and the fish bowl. In discussions I’ve particularly enjoyed the fish bowl as it allows me to hear from everyone in the class as to how they felt on the readings. While some students might not be apt to share in a normal discussion, I like how the fish bowl requires everyone to participate and it’s more enjoyable to hear how everyone interpreted the readings.”

“I have not found any aspects of the course to not be useful, as they’ve all helped to add some aspect to my portrayal of the events at Chernobyl.”

“I think that the spacing of the assignments and the workload are both appropriate for this course. I never feel like I am just doing busywork, which I really appreciate.”

“I think that the assignments have been doable and although the readings are sometimes fairly substantial, it all feels like it is working towards the goals of the course.”

“The structuring has been one of the strongest parts of the class. There tends to be a lot of things crammed into each week, but it is manageable. The pacing for assignments has been extremely reasonable.”

“I think the structure and pacing of the course has been very good. Given the scope of this course, the online questions and responses averaging around 1 response a week, has kept the workload constant without including the essays and drafting. While sometimes the sheer amount of reading seems daunting, it is manageable and understandable given the amount of media and pop culture references to Chernobyl. All the readings, movies, and video games help in my understanding of the entire story and are enjoyable, making the demand seem less than it actually is and appropriate for the goals, level, and demand of the course.”

“I think the online writing assignments have gone well and help to supplement the readings well.”

“The online responses/questions have definitely been manageable as I decide when I do them. The essay steps and WA consultations were fairly spaced out.”

“I think that they are definitely reasonable. I appreciate the opportunities that we are given to revise and improve our work. Feedback from our instructor and our WAs has been very helpful.”

“As someone unaccustomed to college-level writing courses and deadlines, the mandatory drafts and WA meetings have been extremely beneficial and helpful in reducing stress and helping me become a stronger, more creative writer.”

“I think the essay process was really valuable and forced me to interrogate, challenge, and expand on some of my ideas over the course of multiple drafts.”

“I’ve really enjoyed the online questions and responses as they help me organize my thoughts before class in preparations of the discussion to follow. The open-ended topic of the essay made it enjoyable to write as I could choose a topic from the novels that interested me to further analyze, and the WA consultation following my draft really helped me to collect my thoughts and create an essay I was proud of. The in-class writings, while sometimes short, have also been enjoyable in allowing me to put my thoughts to paper before advancing into discussion.

“The classroom atmosphere is extremely easygoing and makes it easy to feel comfortable bringing up new ideas.”

“I felt the class provided adequate spaces to share my ideas freely and honestly. I was able to share my ideas, well aware of the fact that they could be argued and discussed. The ability to constantly collaborate and discuss our own ideas was something I appreciated a lot. Because of the continuous amount of times I switched partners and groups for discussion, I was able to practice my skills to share my ideas.”

“I think that we have a good classroom atmosphere. We almost always have super engaging and insightful conversations given any question. While sharing in a large group can be nerve-racking, I think that our classroom is an environment in which most people feel more comfortable doing this.”

“I think that the discussions are well run and that they spur interesting conversation with the class.”

“The atmosphere in this class has been the most welcoming of any class I have taken at Swarthmore so far.”

“The discussion component of the course has been very enjoyable in allowing me to see how everyone in the course has interpreted the readings differently. In these discussions I personally do feel that I have an opportunity to express how I feel freely with others and that they will respond with their own ideas.”

“The feedback I receive from the professor is constructive. I appreciate the fast responses of online feedback. I am able to further [explore] my ideas this way that I developed through my initial online responses. The in-person feedback is also constructive but not always provided which is completely understandable. The in-person feedback keeps me on my toes, asking me to clarify my ideas on the spot rather than taking my sweet time to work it out.”

“The feedback to the essay was very helpful to me in doing a second draft. I think that what I’ve gotten has generally been helpful.”

“The feedback I have received online and in person have been very clear and constructive, making it very easy to see what I need to work improve in my writing and analysis. On top of this, the feedback is provided very soon after submission so I have plenty of time to think it over and apply it to my writing.”

“It’s unfortunate semester had this wrench thrown in it because this class has been my favorite this semester.”