

Sample Student Evaluations for José Vergara
ESEM 012: A History of Time Travel
Bryn Mawr College
Fall 2022

“I love the discussion aspect of the class because it keeps me really engaged and interested in what we are learning. It also motivates me to get my homework done on time because I want to be able to participate. Additionally, at the beginning, I thought the discussion posts were a little bit of a pain but I have found that I quite like reading through other’s posts and responses to see how other people viewed the same content differently. It also sometimes inspires ideas for writing when I’m feeling stuck.”

“The media selected are all quite interesting; I’m impressed by your ability to curate and would never have been able to find such thematically diverse media myself. I also think the device of the course playlist is a clever way to get students engaged in intertextuality.”

“Honestly, I’m a strong fan of the way discussions are run in this course, it feels like there is a relief of pressure. Not having the hand raising/calling directly on people makes it easier for me to participate after gathering my thoughts on what I actually want to contribute. I know it might be wrong to say, but it makes it feel less like a class, and truly, more like a discussion among peers. The option of having my own agency in participating makes me feel more confident about myself, and as such, there hasn’t really been a time where I felt uncomfortable or forced to participate. I’m not sure how well of a job I’m doing, but I do try to take time to back off the conversation too in order to allow for more voices to be heard, because everyone in this class is so smart and it makes me happy to come to class every Tu/Th! Additionally, I really enjoy having the set time for conferences. I understand that having these conferences are a part of all Esems in general, however, it makes getting feedback on my work feel more engaging, because honestly, it’s hard for me to internalize feedback when I’m just reading it and not discussing. For this reason, I try mostly to show up to your office hours for advice because I find them more productive than an email, but I know there are some fixes that are much simpler to gain from an email. The same goes for peer review, I really find it useful as a way to get to connect with peers and have a broader audience view my work. There are some things I never would have thought about if it weren’t for the feedback from my peers. Setting that time aside in class takes away some of the stress associated with planning around schedules too, so I think it is always a productive use of time for the days you have set for just peer review. Overall, I really appreciate how you run this course, and just your teaching style in general, because I always feel engaged in class and leave class feeling energized rather than drained.”

“I think the class discussions are the most productive for me since I get to understand a lot more of the text than I would be able to if just reading and analysing it myself since everyone brings up very different points and views.”

- “Another thing I find very helpful for processing the texts is the weekly discussion questions and answers. This is because I sometimes don’t process every aspect of the text immediately, but when I have to identify one part of it I found more or less interesting than others, I have to pay utmost attention throughout watching or reading it, and it helps me have a clear goal in mind. Additionally, the fact that we have to answer someone else’s questions helps me reflect on the class discussions themselves.”
- “I found that group discussions about the texts or media that we had watched were really helpful to my overall understanding and also helped me more closely analyze the things we had read/watched. I also think that peer review and our meetings with you are helpful in revising my essays.”
- “I’ve found the class discussions to be very engaging, as I get perspectives and ideas from many different people. I also thought the opinion discussion we did to be very interesting and a novel take on our discussions.”
- “I have enjoyed how much of the class is discussion based. I think this really helps to understand material that may have been confusing before, and also seems to be a safe space to share ideas about the material and get feedback.”
- “Enjoyed the spectrum activity, hear opinions even if not through words.”
- “The way discussions were managed was really interesting. I liked how students run the discussions were because it felt less like an evaluation and more like a discussion between friends, which made me a lot more comfortable with sharing and contributing to them.”
- “The spacing and number of assignments has been appropriate. I feel like with the course load, I have time to think about my essays, and grow as a writer.”
- “Yes, the spacing and number of assignments has been completely reasonable. I have actually talked to some friends in other ESEMS whose courses are either much faster or much slower. One of my friends wrote their first essay for their ESEM this past week and it had to be 1000 words long. I appreciate the many smaller essays, with word counts that build up, allowing us to have practice and receive feedback intermittently.”
- “I think the amount of work load has been really appropriate for the goals of this course.”
- “I thought the discussion questions were annoying at first, but they are now one of my favorite parts. They make me think critically about a text, but also I gain a lot of insight from seeing what other people noticed or had questions about.”
- “The peer-review sessions have been incredibly helpful. Both times I continued my conversation with my peer-reviewer after class finished. I think since these texts are sometimes very interpretative, it’s nice to have someone else’s view. Also, I am a relatively harsh peer reviewer and I am thrilled to say I have received equally constructive criticism from my peers.”
- “Honestly, I really, and I mean really, enjoy writing so I see no problem with any of the writings so far, it’s more so about scheduling the appropriate times to write or prep for writing in general. I think that your feedback has challenged me, in positive ways, to rethink what I thought I knew about some of my tendencies. In terms of peer review, I like being able to read what my peers are

interpreting about the media we've observed and really enjoy giving and getting feedback! It makes writing feel more collaborative :)”

“I really like peer review. I do receive a lot of useful and great comments on my writings.”

“I appreciate the way the length of the essay increases periodically, and also how the topic of the essay gets more open-ended as we continue since it allowed me to first understand what was wanted before having to find my own path.”

“I also like the combination of peer review sessions and conferences since it gives me two different perspectives on my work.”

“The online questions and responses are one of the most helpful parts of the class in terms of reflection and concentration.”

“The one-on-one writing conferences have been very useful and insightful. The feedback has been very useful in realizing, generally, how I can improve my writing as problems or improvements are suggested multiple times throughout sessions.”

“Honestly, I wish I had them more often or for longer. Especially after having peer-review sessions, it is so nice to see the similarities and differences between what you say and what my peer-review partner said about my draft. It also encourages me to write and revise, which has never really been something I have been excited about in the past. Generally, revising feels like a chore, whereas here it inspires me to make something that will make me more proud.”

“I really see a lot of value in being able to meet one-on-one, so thank you for making it possible to do so, and thank you for getting so into giving back feedback on work!”

“I think that one-on-one writing conferences are really useful. I do receive a lot of useful comments to revise my essays.”

“The one-on-one writing conferences help a lot since I get a better understanding of my essays and also get an over, especially since they take place consistently.”

“I really like the one-on-one conferences, they help me with getting better at writing my essays and also help point out where I need to revise and change my essays.”

“I think that they are quite helpful. They're the most useful advice and feedback on my writing that I've gotten from my teacher in several years.”

“I really like [the one-on-one conferences]. It gives an opportunity to discuss the writing rather than just get it back covered in red pen, and I think this is how you get people to take feedback. When you understand the feedback it's easier to take.”

“They're really helpful and feel constructive. I like the way you give feedback. It never feels mean but it's also still helpful.”

“The classroom is very engaged and attentive when answering questions, building off of one another in a productive way.”

“I really did like the exercise for *Arrival* where you made a variety of statements and we had to vote with our feet on them.”

“As mentioned earlier, discussions are one of the aspects that makes this class feel so engaging and dynamic to me. I personally enjoy the free discussion, I think it makes me feel more included in

the sense that I can jump in when I have the need to mention something rather than anxiously worry about 'missing' my turn. The classroom environment as a whole feels very safe and everyone seems pretty inclusive and open to ideas while building upon each other."

"I really like our classroom atmosphere when discussing. It includes everyone and let everyone able to share their thoughts."

"I think the discussion component of the class is great because it helps me gain a better understanding of the texts."

"I think a good happy medium is what we did in class today (thursday) where we looked at people's discussion posts and discussed them with a partner, and then with the whole group. I felt like I learned a lot."

"I love seeing things from different perspectives, but when it challenges the very way I think about things it's even better."

"During the activity we did few days ago, one of the questions was [about whether] knowing your future is a burden. I really liked the questions, and many comments really inspired me to think about my own experiences and what should I write about the essay."

"Thank you for this class! I'm finding a lot of enjoyment in it :) I really enjoy your method of teaching, and would love the opportunity to take more of your courses in the future."

"I really liked the environment of the class. Each student brings the proper energy and Professor Vergara is really considerate and open-minded. This class is heavily discussion-based, but even introverts such as myself are still able to keep up and find the confidence to contribute because of how kind everyone is. Even when we disagree on certain topics regarding to the source, we all respect each other's opinions."

"I very much enjoyed the dynamic of the class. Something that really worked for me is the style of grading and method of participation that was expected. Each student is expected to discussion lead once, and from there the discussion opens to the whole classroom. Occasionally there are days of writing workshops that allow us, the students, to work on our writing techniques. Additionally, peer review happens about every two essays, which I think is a valid amount of time between each peer review (I love peer reviewing!!). I think the homework pace is very manageable — it's all about scheduling to your time."

"A mostly student led discussion class. Students were engaged and discussions were interesting and consistently helped with understanding of class texts."

"The work to be done outside of class was usually to complete a reading or viewing and write a discussion question on it. Occasionally, we were instructed to write an essay that we would peer-review in class. The class itself was mostly discussion based, with one student leading the discussion and the others contributing (we signed up for days at the beginning of the year). Jose would also sometimes pose questions for thought, but there were no returnables given in class. I found that this system worked well and allowed me to discuss the things I did not understand and go more in depth on those I did with my classmates."

"A discussion oriented class, filled with students passionate on the subject matter."

“It was a discussion-based class, wherein we had to read or view texts before each class, needing to post discussion questions about one text every week before class and an answer to another person’s question before the end of the week, and we then discussed the texts within the class. The discussions were always energetic, with a different student leading the discussion in each class. The students often spoke as much as the teacher, with our professor contributing his own points and often closing discussions but not giving his own points any more importance than those of the class. We had to write an essay every week or two, with a total of 7 during the semester, and had peer review sessions for these after every two essays. The energy of both the students and the professor was good, always being genuinely interested in the texts and topics.”

“Jose Vergara clearly enjoys and is passionate about all of the texts and films we read and watched.”

“It was a very fun class with a great atmosphere. Discussions were very informal but remained productive and thoughtful. The selection of texts was very precise and allowed for exploration into a variety of genres and subjects.”

“I’m not a stranger to seminar-based discussion formats, and the flaws endemic to that form were not absent here, but were considerably lessened by the energy of Prof. Vergara. He is a calm personality, manages to bring out the insight in more reticent students, and come up with clever ways to bring a class to contemplation. My favorite exercises were ones where he made a controversial literary statement (eg Louise [in *Arrival*] made the right decision) and made us all vote with our feet.”

“I really liked *The Merchant and the Alchemist’s Gate* because it stood out from all the stories we had previously read. It was also told from the perspective of someone actively telling a story and it felt like something I could have read as a kid, in a good way.”

“*Interstellar* and *Arrival* are my favorite movies that we’ve watched for class because of how they explore relationships. They also have a more positive message about time compared to many of the other texts we’ve watched.”

“*Interstellar*, a film that we watched for class stood out because it was complex and had many deeper meanings, but was a lot more accessible than some of the texts we read. Many of the more complicated readings were hard to get through or fully understand but I think this was a good middle point, where it was easier to grasp the concept but there was still many interesting and confusing ideas presented in the material.”

“*Slaughterhouse-Five* and ‘Region of Unlikeness’ are the texts that stood out to me. I really enjoyed *Slaughterhouse-Five* because the narrative was personally exciting to me which made it fun to analyze, critique, and ultimately write about. ‘Region of Unlikeness’ was a love to hate read for me, I had the most enjoyable time interpreting the reading, even if I hated what the literature was saying in its themes. These were based on a few of my favorite read and analyze essay, however, I loved all the content of this course.”

“I especially enjoyed the variety of movies we watched for the class as visuals are a very important for time travel narratives.”

“I really loved all of Ted Chiang’s work, of which we watched *Arrival* and read two short stories. I

had not seen *Arrival* previous to this class and I really loved it, as well as found Chiang's writing style exciting and engaging. I also liked that we explored some less 'mainstream' media, like *La Jetee*, which was a *photoroman*, and Dunne's *An Experiment with Time*, which was a really interesting memoir of sorts. I did not enjoy Galchen's writing much when I first read it, but Jose arranged a meeting with the author which gave me valuable new insight into the writing."

"A Region of Unlikeness' and 'The Merchant and the Alchemist's Gate.' These texts stood out to me because I thought they were the most fun to read. I believe they differed from the commonly used format of a time travel story which felt like a breath of fresh air."

"I think one that stood out to me was *Arrival*, based on the short story 'Story of Your Life,' because it included a form of time travel I hadn't ever seen before. It spoke of a non-linear way of viewing time, which was possible because of the language used by the aliens which was also non-linear, and as a linguist learned this language, she began to have a different perspective on time. This fascinated me since it seemed like a strange mix of linguistics and physics, and how language can genuinely change how you look at life and think. Another text I found interesting was *Interstellar* since this had a version of time travel that is possibly the most realistic, with it being about the dilation of time due to differences in gravitational pulls. This was interesting to discuss since it played into the relationship between love and science."

"I enjoyed reading *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut. It was the only full-length book we read, and I thought it was good and applicable to the course."

"I enjoyed the short story 'Garden of Forking Paths' and the movie *Arrival* quite a bit. 'The Garden of Forking Paths' stood out to me immediately due to its exploration of multiple universes, which is a topic of great interest to me. *Arrival* spoke to me because of its deep message and its exploration of communication with the aliens, which while unrelated to the course material, was fascinating."

"My favorite texts were the ones translated from the Russian, Bitov's 'Pushkin's Photograph' and Krzhizhanofsky perhaps because Prof. Vergara specializes in them and can share the most complicated insights. They felt like works of literature in themselves, and not merely vehicles for a time-travel plot. I know this course is about time travel, but I don't mind a knotty or nuanced text in addition."

"*Predestination*, the film, because there was a lot of material to analyze, considering the source material, '--All You Zombies--' by Heinlein."

- I think I developed a lot as a writer during this semester. I'm glad we were able to slowly evolve from writing 500-word essays to 1,295-word essays so that we can slowly develop our writing. I think as a writer, I improved a lot in writing conclusions and how to balance out evidence and analysis."

"The class was very helpful for the transition to college writing. I found the assignment in which we had to write an essay on a prompt we came up with difficult but ultimately very helpful."

"The writing I did in high school was very formulaic, and I mean it: we literally had a formula for how to structure a paragraph. I really enjoyed stepping outside of the five paragraph, CSET

structure (claim setup evidence tie-in), which was a huge challenge for me, but I think really helped me grow as a writer. I learned that an essay can still be effective without such a rigid format, though some things, like having a strong claim and making sure the essay has a clear structure are important. No specific assignment really stood out, but I really appreciated Jose's approach where we went from writing shorter essays with more specific prompts to longer ones where we had more control. Additionally, I really liked the emails he sent about structure, which would help me get out of my head when I was feeling overwhelmed while planning my essay. I am planning on rewriting/editing my first essay for my final portfolio to show my progress over this course.”

“In high school we did not conduct peer reviews, I thought those were very helpful in my writing development because you garner a new view that is not strictly from your professor.”

“I think my writing improved a lot this semester because of this class. There wasn't any one class or assignment that stood out, but the way the professor incorporated writing workshops into class every week, addressing a different topic as we progressed, really helped me when writing. For every essay, I was able to focus on a new part of the essay as I continued, and towards the end of the semester, I learnt to merge all the parts of the essay into one good piece of writing.”

“I've written more essays for this class than I did all of last year in high school. I definitely feel that my writing skills have improved, and I liked the essays that allowed for more creative freedom than the ones with very specific prompts.”

“In this semester I began to take more time to consider and plan out my writing, which is a habit that I fell out of due to practicing extensively for AP tests during high school. I was also forced to engage more with my writing after 'finishing' it, which is another skill that I hadn't developed as much.”

“I've written a lot of essays in high school and otherwise, so I don't think the literary analysis assignments were particularly formative. But the subjective writing--eg, what is your relationship to time--allowed us to break some of the rules to which we had grown accustomed to. Prof. Vergara was also very accommodating to some of my ideas for modification, such as when he allowed me to write my essay on *La Jetee*, a film composed mostly of still photos, in a bulletpoint format.”

“I developed as a writer in the sense that I learned how to focus my writing more.”

“During the conferences, we went over my essays and what I could improve upon. Overall they were really helpful.”

“During the conferences, we went over our essays and what Professor Vergara liked as well as had less positive feedback on. Even if Professor Vergara has criticisms on your essay, he always makes sure to address it in a kind way, and phrases criticisms as clarifications.”

“In our conferences we would discuss the last two essays assigned in class and receive feedback on them. He would also ask about our peer review session and class in general, but the majority was focused on the essays.”

“In the conferences we discussed what needed to be revised in essays, the themes I most enjoyed

analyzing, what I did well in a particular essay I've turned in, and overall progress. I think the one on one conferences were extremely helpful for me, because I internalize critique best when I can discuss about certain things I did, allowing me to articulate/expand on areas that I might have failed to demonstrate in my work. It helps avoid confusion."

"The conferences were incredibly helpful. Jose and I would sit down and talk about my essays, the peer-reviews I received, and his feedback. I always left feeling excited to do revisions, which is a rare occurrence for me, because Jose would give kind and feasible suggestions to improve my writing, while pointing out the things I had improved on. It made for a very positive and productive experience."

"We went over my weakness of my papers as well as my strengths, I thought doing this left me with ideas of development, while also understanding what I succeed in."

"In the conferences, we primarily discussed the two previous essays written, with the professor giving feedback on the two and explaining his views on my writing. These helped a lot, especially since he gave a lot of written and specific feedback, and though some parts of the feedback were slightly more generic and difficult to incorporate, I appreciate that most of the feedback made a lot of sense and helped me improve my writing in the future."

"Jose gave me feedback on my essays and suggestions for things to add. I liked his feedback and it was helpful in revising the essays."

"My peers always have clever contributions and their valuable insight helps me learn more about the source material in class."

"My peers have contributed to my learning experience both inside and outside of the classroom environment. We can discuss ideas with each other and help with clarifications when necessary. Additionally, in class, we have specific times for peer review."

"Yes. I'm friends with a lot of the people from this course, and we get lunch after classes most weeks. The peer review sessions were also really helpful for gaining feedback and growing as a writer."

"Absolutely! Because this course was very discussion-based, most of what I learned was in fact from my peers. We all discussed the texts/films we analyzed, and our own personal takes on them. Jose gave us guiding questions, but most of my questions were answered by my peers and often my classmates would have a completely different take on the text, that I had not even considered. It was a very valuable experience and I really enjoyed the structure that allowed this. In addition, it allowed my peers and I to form a bond that extended beyond class, since often our passionate discussions would continue as we walked out of class and to lunch together. Finally, I really enjoyed the peer-review sessions I had in which my peers really gave thought to my writing and how I could improve it."

"My class had students who were very interested in the subject of time travel, therefore every class was filled with discussion, new ideas, and different perspectives. I never felt bored in that class, and I could feel the passion from my peers."

"Yes, they contributed a lot. This was most obvious during the peer review sessions, wherein we were put in pairs and gave feedback on each others' writing. Not only did it help me by receiving

feedback on my own work, but also through understanding how to edit other people's writing. My peers also taught me a lot during class discussions because of the insightful points they brought up."

"Yes, we usually spend most of class having a discussion, and a lot of the ideas brought up by my peers wouldn't even have occurred to me."

"Yes, I found my peers to be quite helpful for this course. Not only did they provide helpful insights during class discussions and the general discussions thread, but I also became good friends with many of them and these bonds will be helpful in the future."

"Prof. Vergara set up very lively peer review sessions which often became the highlight of the week. Sitting down next to my classmates and discussing their ideas one-on-one was very productive for me, and I got lots of insight into how to improve from them. Often we would go to lunch afterward and continue the conversation from there because their ideas were so fascinating."

"I learned about a new style of citation and began to learn how to cite my sources on my own without the use of an outside tool."

"I had a really enjoyable time in my ESem and I think it is a valuable course. I learned in different ways than I expected, and I wouldn't trade the experience for the world. Special thanks to José for putting so much effort into planning and running the course! You only get as much out of it as you put in :)"

"I really loved this professor and wish I could take more classes with him. The structure of the class made it so that E-Sem was productive, fun, and engaging. Also, Jose would do check-ins every few weeks, in which we could give feedback about the course. Just like this one, it was anonymous, but I think that should maybe be incorporated in other E-Sems so that the professors don't receive all the feedback after their course is already finished."

"ESem was one of the most interesting classes and the professor allowed us to discuss and contribute all of our opinions equally. I learnt a lot throughout."

"I really enjoyed this class and Jose was a great professor. I would absolutely take another one of his classes."

"José Vergara was an excellent professor, and I hope to have more classes with him in the future. Not only did he consistently give helpful feedback and advice, but he also made the class a fun environment. He was always conscious of the work-life balance of his students in regards to how he scheduled out and informed us of assignments, and overall I had a wonderful experience."

"The room where we met (in the English House) is beautiful and Prof. Vergara should get to use it as much as he can."