

Sample Student Evaluations for José Vergara  
RUSS 220: Chernobyl  
Bryn Mawr College  
Fall 2023

“He works really hard to make sure every student understands the materials, and is very willing to offer support to students struggling in the class or mentally/medically.”

“I think he is very good at leading discussion. I also think he is very accessible.”

“I think Professor Vergara provided a great variety of texts and context for the course, considering the multidisciplinary aspects, as well as the usage of creative projects to supplement more traditional work. I also think that the course provided outlets for every student’s form of expression and interests in the field. Being centered around an event, the course was able to be integrated into many fields.”

“Professor Vergara is very passionate about the subject matter.”

“Professor Vergara is passionate about the subject material and chose interesting, informative readings. He is responsive to student ideas and provides in-depth feedback to assignments and discussion points. I also appreciated the type of assignments we were given, which allowed us to explore the topic from artistic as well as analytical perspectives.”

“He’s always trying new things to make class more interactive, and he’s very open to discussion and questions if you’re struggling with a certain topic or assignment.”

“José Vergara had a strong knowledge of all material we encountered in the class and was always able to answer questions or provide more information about anything we wanted to know. For such a niche subject area there, I was surprised that there even exists this much material, let alone his knowledge of it. He was willing to listen to student feedback and encouraged our participation in creating the class format, often using questions we asked to make lecture/discussion slides.”

“I thought Professor Vergara brought a unique array of materials, readings, media, etc. to the course that enhanced our learning. I think the class discussion[s] were helpful. I enjoyed discussions questions that were raised by students that were brought to our class discussion because it felt like we address[e] student[s]’ interests on the material we read.”

“Professor Vergara’s major strengths are his attentiveness, flexibility, open-mindedness, and

structure. He is dedicated to providing students with a well rounded education, which includes having his students observe many forms of media from a variety of authors. He listens and frequently incorporates student feedback into his lesson planning. I personally really appreciate that he allows students to have so much agency in our class discussions, because that is definitely my preferable learning environment. Another thing I greatly appreciate is that Professor Vergara provides unique opportunities to his students and is encouraging us to take learning outside of the classroom.”

“THANK YOU FOR HAVING THIS COURSE THIS SEMESTER! I've learned so much more than I expected to and I'm very grateful for it. I didn't expect my perspective of the world to shift so drastically from this course, but it has and it's been truly such a wonderful experience.”

“I think Prof. Vergara facilitates class quite well. He guides our class discussions without controlling it.”

“No prior courses felt necessary and while the class had a large workload it matched up with the listing.”

“I was prepared. This course is at the appropriate level.”

“The course is listed at the appropriate level.”

“Yes, I think it's listed at an appropriate level. Even though it's a 200 level Russian course, you don't need to have any background knowledge of Russian to take it and do well in this class.”

«I have LOVED and valued all of the work I have contributed to the course, and I do find it all necessary work.”

“I felt pretty prepared to take this course, because it combines a lot of the skills I have acquired from various humanities courses I've taken (like English and History classes). Yes, I would say this course is listed at the appropriate level.”

“The self grading system makes learning fairly accessible as students know their own needs and limitations so are better able to grade accordingly.”

“I would say he was very welcoming and did have an accessible environment.”

“Professor Vergara was very flexible with his deadlines and ability to change the syllabus when we needed to. He always provided us ample time when the syllabus changed.”

“He was understanding of my circumstances that required me to miss class sometimes.”

“Professor Vergara, as I mentioned, is understanding and able to accommodate students on homework and discussion when adequate notice is given. Zoom options were offered for sick students so that they could still come to class if able. I appreciated the system of student self-evaluation, which I think encouraged students to honestly examine our own work in the class.”

“He takes a lot of feedback from the class to make sure all of our learning styles and needs are being met.”

“In this class José Vergara provided opportunity for participation online in the form of discussion and response questions, so that even those who did not want to speak in class were part of the discussion. He did however encourage everyone to participate in class discussions. He offers a flexible and collaborative system for grading, so we are able to focus on improvement and learning rather than grades. Also, he offered a hybrid option for class if people needed.”

Professor Vergara effectively created an accessible and inclusive course experience by frequently checking in with his students to ensure that their needs/concerns/feedback was being heard. I appreciate how he does not force anyone to participate, because some days do really call for a backseat. He lets students meet him where they're currently at and showing up as, which is extremely important and considerate. Since Professor Vergara works under a collaboration grading environment, it takes some of the pressure of academics off because students are aware that they need to take learning seriously and into their own hands. He's very understanding and recognizes that he is also always learning as students come in with new, individual needs. I find him to be very adaptable to most situations which is why he is good at navigating the class environment.”

“I think he did create an accessible and inclusive course experience. I think he was receptive to feedback from the class and if anyone came to him with anything I'm sure he would adjust things.”

“Yes, I loved it! I thought it was really fun, although I mostly enjoyed the literature aspects.”

“I would recommend this course, as taught by Prof. Vergara, to other students. The course provides a multidisciplinary examination of the Chernobyl NPP disaster from a variety of different perspectives that allowed me to discuss the topic fluently and apply my understanding of it in other classes when talking about related subjects, such as nuclear power in general.”

“Yes, and I have. This is my second course with him and it’s always my favorite class of the semester.

The material that we learn as well as the discussion that comes from class always feels fruitful and engaging.”

“Yes, I think it was an interesting dive into a complicated topic. There was always something new to learn and look for if we were willing. It is a course that after leaving I feel like there is a really concrete knowledge of a subject matter. Even though it was a little reading heavy, I think the course was engaging and informative.”

“I would HIGHLY recommend this course taught by Professor Vergara because nuclear energy and Russian culture/history/politics is very clearly his niche. I truly learned so much from this course that I didn't expect to learn about Russia and the Chernobyl disaster. I think that, because of Professor Vergara’s investment in the topic, he is the best person to teach this course.”

“Yes I would. I think it was an interesting course on a topic I hadn’t yet been able to explore. I think after this course I know a lot more about the topic and I’ve gathered more skills for doing humanities courses.”

“I have really enjoyed my experience in the course.”

“Had a lot of fun!”

“GIVE HIM TENURE. FOREVER.”

“José Vergara has a clear emphasis on sharing what we learn in class with people outside the class. I really appreciate this in terms of making our projects public so that they can be seen by whoever wants.”

“Professor Vergara is clearly passionate about what he is interested in and I really respect that. I would definitely take another course with Professor Vergara in the future because I am a fan of his collaborative teaching style. I look forward to what is being offered in the future.”

“I am someone who like to learn about other people experiences so reading and learning about peoples experiences such as them telling their own story is really interesting to me. Such as the voices to Chernobyl really hooked me.”

“I find it really helpful when we come together as a class to discuss the topics.”

“I’ve found the more interactive things to be more helpful because it helps me to put our readings into context in my mind and expand on the texts.”

“I think our discussions of themes like contamination and the Zone have been really powerful.”

“[We’ve] had plenty of rich small discussions that I’ve LOVED. Overall, I would say I am pleased with this course and have found most of the current tactics very engaging and productive for learning.”

The class discussions have been the best part of the class so far. I do like to talk with a smaller group sometimes to organize my thoughts.”

“I also enjoy the discussion supplemented by the Google Doc questions and responses, because it facilitated discussion that might not have otherwise happened (it encourages people to engage with the readings in depth and actually think about what they meant).”

“I’ve found the interactive elements and their debriefs very useful! (i.e. the play, the talking to plants, etc.).”

“I think the wide range of media, sources, readings, etc. we pull from. I really like that we have a more scientific talk earlier on about nuclear energy to understand what’s going and how we bring together lots of different aspects from different departments. I also really like it when we discuss student discussion questions as well because I feel like we are touching more on topics and questions that students are interested in and want to learn more about.”

“I think the discussion questions that we do are really engaging because it makes you think deeply about the material and responding to them makes you consider different things and perspectives that you haven’t before. I also really enjoy listening to tracks or watching videos for homework because I tend to be a visual learner.”

“I have found the most productive parts of the class to be the actual discussions that come from the questions we pose. I am able to articulate my thoughts better through discussion and come up with responses to arguments posed in class better.”

“I enjoy having to do the discussion questions -- it helps me figure out what I want to say about the readings prior to class. I also enjoy that we have a decent amount of small group discussion before large group discussion, because it also helps me formulate ideas.”

“I’ve found the music aspect really helpful to find themes in texts. I like that as a part of the class. I also feel like the play activity was a really interesting way to interact with the material.”

“In recent weeks, the interactive activities where we went outside to converse with plants or act out sections of a play were a big help in understanding the nuances of the texts we read for those

perspective classes. They're a fun way to frame the material and also help to put us in the shoes of the original author."

"The pacing of this course has been good."

"I haven't felt overwhelmed by assignments."

"The weekly reflections and responses were appropriate and I found them very helpful for discussion. I think the flow and spacing of the assignments and readings are appropriate. I think overall the spacing and number of assignments have been appropriate."

"The spacing of assignments for the reactor room has been consistent and clear."

"I feel the spacing and number of assignments has been reasonable."

"I am glad that the writing hasn't seemed overly intense and I think the writing expected for this course is at a good level."

"I really liked the postcard idea, I thought it was a fun way to bring the learning outside of the classroom."

"It's mostly been the weekly discussion doc posts so far in terms of writing, which have been helpful for me to have to put my thoughts on the week's topic/readings into a concise few sentences that I can look back on and immediately remind me of what I wanted to talk/think about in class."

"Very interesting and perfectly paced/ supported."

"I like how the writing for the project is allowed to be something that interests me and is not a specific assignment, and also I look forward to seeing the other unique ideas being shared."

"The weekly questions and responses are an appropriate level of difficulty, and I appreciate that there wasn't a minimum or maximum word count, because it allows me to write more or less depending on how much I got out of the material."

"The weekly response format seems to work well, I appreciate the flexibility and relatively casual format while also allowing a space to dig into aspects that we don't touch on in class discussions or particular angles I found interesting that weren't relevant to the broader class."

"I appreciate that the directions are really clear and precise. Since they are tied to the physical exhibit I think it feels like there's a purpose to it which is helpful."

"The writing assignments have been achievable and easy to comprehend."

"I think we have a good classroom culture. I like the many modes for [discussion]."

“Personally, I feel free to express my ideas freely! I think we have created an atmosphere where people can freely express and listen without judgement.”

“I think that the discussion component of this class was great, just as I hoped. I am the kind of person to speak up however I feel the students calling on students is a way to prevent monopolization of the space which I always appreciate.”

“I liked the structure of speakers handing off the discussion to people raising their hands, because it led to more direct engagement with each other and not just a call-and-response format with you as the professor.

“I think the times that people talk has been more even than in other classes I’ve been in. I think it's to do with the content-- people find it really interesting and it provokes a lot of strong responses.”

I enjoy the classroom atmosphere, I think we approach the topic with sensitivity which is undoubtedly very important, but we also have moments of humor and fun which keeps the class moving forward. I also like the opportunity to express our own ideas freely because it allows us to contribute things that are substantial, thought out, and can keep the conversation flowing instead of something thought of in the spur of the moment.”

“I feel comfortable expressing my ideas and how I feel.”

“I enjoy the opportun[i]ties to discuss with my classmates their thoughts on the readings. While not everyone in class has a literary background, I think we have all done a fair job of asserting ourselves within the literature.”

“I feel really good about it. I think we have a really great group of respectful, kind people and that discussion flows really well.”

“I work best in small group discussions and having a chance to formulate those thoughts before moving to a larger group discussion works really well for me.”

“I have not found it difficult to share my thoughts in the free-flow of conversation.”

“I like the way students call on each other and the discussions feel productive.”

“Yes, the feedback is mostly building upon and encouraging constructively in this class, which helps me work to improve my work with that base to go off of.”

“Yes, it is constructive, for my proposal, I got 2 constructive feedbacks, especially with the readings that I may find helpful, which I greatly appreciated.”

“Yes! I appreciate your personalized e-mail responses to activities we’ve done. I don't know what could be improved about that feedback.”

“Yes, I think the feedback I received is constructive. I don’t have any complaints with how it is done and don't see how else it can be improved.”

“I appreciate the amount of help I was given with finding resources and information for my project that might help to improve it.”

“I think it’s cool to see what people are interested in even when it maybe didn't come out during class.”

“YES definitely and I'm so grateful for it. You are very on top of your emails, and I know when the need arises, you would be available to work out a time to meet with me [...] You are also very receptive to helping find solutions to difficulties and good at resource guiding.”

“I have had prompt email responses and always felt welcome to reach out.”

Yes! I haven’t had any issues and emails have been constructive and timely.”

“Yes, the instructor does provide feedback in an appropriate amount of time.”

“When I got to learn about heterotopias from my discussion partner! It was just the word I was searching for to describe my thoughts, a very good ‘aha’ moment!”

“The session when we learned about the more technical, scientific side of Chernobyl was great for me because it allowed me to bridge the gap in my mind between the more humanistic approach and the energy production side that I’ve learned about in other classes on the more environmental side of things.”

“The idea that the Zone was really just a construct fundamentally changed how I think about Big Government and the environment.”

The discussion we had after the short plays was really useful to me, as well as the discussion about the plants we talked to. I felt like we managed to get at and articulate some theoretical concepts that don’t always clarify in normal discussion.”

“When someone brought up Chernobyl radiation as a hyperobject. I knew it was true, but I never thought to make that connection between the nuclear disaster and a hyperobject.”

“I think the concept of giving a voice to things that don’t have a voice (i.e. nature, animals) was really cool and made me think about Chernobyl in a way that allowed me to understand the consequences of Chernobyl a much broader than just affecting people. I just feel like I



normally don't have this kind of mindset and it was interesting to think about that more."

"During one of our conversation on Voices from Chernobyl, I was having trouble grasping how to construct the idea of faith practice in the face of such a disaster. I am always very interested in the faith perspective, but the looseness of the concept made it difficult for me to put that into words. However, through my own research, I managed to find ideas of treating God as a nuclear idea, and that made me a lot more poised to be able to tackle these quotations I was having trouble with."

"I learned about heterotopias in another class but the concept was really fuzzy and confusing. Having another example and way to discuss them was really helpful and I find the idea really interesting now. I never considered Belarus. I always thought Chornobyl->Ukraine. I had a moment of understanding the issues with 'stalkers' in a new perspective in addition to the health and safety issues it poses."