

## NARRATIVE STATEMENT

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Motivating students to look beyond right or wrong answers and embrace a vigorous process of learning requires special dedication to preparation for class and a conscious, encouraging attitude towards students. I strive to prepare each class thoroughly and flexibly, anticipating as best as possible the potential paths that students may wish to pursue with the conversation or activities. Having an encouraging, professional attitude not only motivates students to speak and reflect upon the issues at stake in the class, but also sets up an overall comfortable atmosphere that is conducive to learning and instills in students a similar attitude that they assume both in and out of the classroom. By emphasizing these two factors in my classroom, I consistently configure dynamic and well-organized activities that challenge students to advance the discussions in class based on the conclusions and ideas that they put forth with my guidance and support.

During the fall semester of 2010 at the University of Pennsylvania, the Spanish language program co-coordinator, Victoria García Serrano, and the SPAN 130 course coordinator, Reyes Caballo Márquez, visited my intermediate Spanish class and offered me valuable observations regarding my teaching performance that confirmed my high preparation and positive attitude with students (See Appendix A). Both instructors remarked the “good use of a classroom space ... for a highly communicative class” (Appendix A.i), as well as a “dynamic” lesson plan and “well thought out” activities (Appendix A.ii). Dr. García Serrano also pointed out my dynamic teaching style and the “student-centered” nature of my class (Appendix A.i). Dr. Caballo Márquez highlighted that my thorough preparation showed not only in my demeanor, but was also evident with my integration of technology along with discussion and the use of the blackboard that contributed to an effective and clear exposition of ideas and responses to student questions. Throughout the class, Dr. Caballo Márquez complimented

my ability to engage the students intellectually and treat them as “intelligent adults.” She also commented on the pleasant atmosphere in the classroom that made students “feel at ease,” prompting her to remark: “All this, combined with his kindness and good attitude towards the students, made me want to be one of them!” (Appendix A.ii).

To show a typical class in my communicative oriented, student-centered intermediate Spanish course, I have included a sample lesson plan (See Appendix B). I would like to call attention to not only the communicative nature of each activity, but also to the use of a Warm-Up activity that relates to what will come later in the class. As the lesson plan states, while students are working in small groups or partners, I walk around the room and participate with different groups for different amounts of time. This way, I am able to modify the activity in new ways with different groups and I can offer personalized explanations to very concrete questions that individual students may have. I can then include such input, as well as the mistakes that I observe, into the different moments of class feedback or activities in subsequent classes. While these brief activities are going on, I always put on popular music (in Spanish) from an Internet radio in the background, which allows students a certain contact with authentic materials in the downtimes of conversations and, most importantly, eliminates the silence that may intimidate students to speak. The music is not loud enough to disturb or dominate the conversations, but forces the students to speak up with one another in a non-threatening, passive way. The video clip from this class exemplifies this style of teaching and the way I make use of classroom space and technology (Appendix D). Finally, as the different activities demonstrate, I always strive to incorporate homework assignments in a predominant light to encourage students to complete these assignments and further their understanding of complex grammatical and cultural topics.

This SPAN 130 course was a multi-section course, and I collaborated in creating different sections of the common exams, quizzes, and compositions. While we shared similar weekly and semester-long objectives, I was responsible for designing the day-to-day activities and materials. To highlight one particular-

ly innovative and useful activity, I asked students to write a 6–10 sentence response every night on the course Discussion Board through Blackboard, which allowed them to access each other’s comments. I chose prompts that allowed for creative responses, involved online research, required communication with other students, promoted grammatical practice, and so on, although their answers invariably would appear in the next day’s class, which helped them become more active and involved in the different class activities each day by guiding their preparation the night before. I graded these responses only by completion, although I would read through them each day to scan for general tendencies and mistakes that I would frequently bring up in class, either by incorporating corrective activities or through brief grammatical or content explanations, which I integrated through a symbiotic relationship into a predominantly communicative classroom. I have included some examples of prompts for these daily written assignments in Appendix E.i. This informal activity pushed students to constantly and comfortably work on writing in Spanish, and showed noticeable improvements over the course of the semester that students could actually see when they looked back on previous responses. While nearly all students offered positive feedback on their course evaluation forms regarding this writing activity, such as “Writing paragraphs was very helpful in working towards goals [of the course],” another student revealed a more honest and telling reaction: “Although I hated writing paragraphs each night, they really helped with my Spanish skills” (Appendix G.i).

For the spring semester of 2011 at the University of Pennsylvania, I led a weekly recitation session for a new advanced multi-sectioned survey course on Spanish cinema, under the direction of professor Michael R. Solomon. Along with three other TAs, we designed and offered this course for the first time, with a full enrollment of 60 students (45 Spanish-speaking sections geared towards Hispanic Studies majors, and 15 English-Speaking cinema studies majors). The course description that I wrote was chosen to be the official description submitted to the Penn Course Catalog (for the full course description, see section 3.B). Since professor Solomon and the other teaching assistants focused most of their

attention on the Hispanic Studies majors and Spanish-speaking sections of the course, I designed and ran the only English-language section composed of advanced Cinema Studies majors. I was responsible for organizing their weekly readings (in English), collaborating with the weekly lectures (also in English) and overall course structure along with professor Solomon and the other TAs, leading a discussion in English for the weekly recitation sessions, creating methods of evaluation, and assigning grades for my students. I created and assigned four short essays that tested students in different ways each time, taking advantage both of traditional and creative approaches to critical thinking (for examples of the prompts see Appendix E.ii-iv). I also created a final take-home exam for students that tested a comprehensive sampling of the topics that we covered throughout the semester in different ways, incorporating both clips, still images, and the readings into the questions (Appendix E.v). Similarly, I led engaging class discussions that integrated a dynamic use of still images and clips, as well as the incorporation of the required and supplementary readings. Instead of stopping class to watch clips that the students had already seen outside of class, I frequently projected clips that continuously looped with the volume lowered so that we could discuss the sequences while experiencing the movement inherent in film. I also regularly projected clips in this fashion, while placing other stills and muted, looping clips around the primary clip to allow for dynamic comparative readings and analyses.

Teaching this Spanish cinema course to advanced cinema studies students in English presented two noteworthy problems. First, I had to attend to English-speaking students that had no assumed previous knowledge of Spain or Spanish culture and language. Therefore, I had to make sure that all the materials were accessible in English (readings, clips, films, etc.) and rigorous enough to challenge students with an advanced comprehension of film theory and world cinema, yet were still able to address basic historical and cultural concepts relevant to Spain. One of the required books that I decided to incorporate into my section to provide needed background and contextual information for Spanish history was also adopted by the other Spanish-speaking sections, despite being written in

English. On several occasions, I needed to create and add subtitles to different clips and entire films that had never been released with English subtitles. I also had to offer brief summaries of Spanish articles and terminology. Through my preparation, my students not only acquired a nuanced vision of contemporary Spain and Spanish cinema, but they were also continuously exposed to and challenged with stimulating discussions of film theory and contemporary critical thought that made a broader impact on their studies as film students.

Reconciling this unequal divide of familiarity of concepts, as well as the unique challenges of teaching cinema in general, led me to develop several interesting activities and approaches to teaching the films and the weekly topics. Each class, I tried new activities that would require students to discuss certain questions or ideas in partners or small groups, which immediately and consistently produced two noticeable effects: first, students felt involved from the start and were able to pursue their own lines of interest; second, students were able to gain a level of confidence for the full class discussions by testing out their ideas and discussing questions with a partner that they may not have felt comfortable asking in a full class setting. These activities directly translated into more efficient and active class discussions. While the activities varied and usually lasted between 5–10 minutes, I often proposed questions that made students think critically about the readings and debate exaggerated claims about the films, while I also put forth complex questions about the feature films as well as general ideas regarding Spanish culture. See Appendix C for some concrete examples of the types of questions or discussions that the students would complete in small groups or pairs before sharing their discussions in a full class setting.

One specific small group activity demonstrates characteristically my emphasis on integrating technology both outside and inside the classroom. Since students regularly brought their laptops to class, I posted 5 key sequences (around 4–6 minutes each) on our Course Site before class and requested that students bring their laptops to class (the Course Site is explained below, or see Appendix F). After a brief discussion about general themes of the film at the beginning of class, I asked students to convene in 5 groups of 3, and assigned a

specific clip on the Course Site to each group. The students had around 15 minutes to thoroughly analyze their assigned clip by viewing it as they desired on one laptop per group. After 15 minutes, I played each clip on the big screen of the classroom with the volume lowered, and each group had to share their comments of the sequence with the class as the clip played. Some groups even branched out and asked questions that involved the rest of the class. Overall, this activity pushed students to analyze and share their readings of the feature film with the class, and promoted an efficient and dynamic class discussion.

Another specific challenge that I had to overcome for CINE 388 was related to one particular unit on avant-garde and non-narrative film. To help students feel more comfortable discussing and reflecting on an unsettling and complex genre such as non-narrative and abstract film, I created a unique medium specificity activity that encouraged students to contemplate the potential of the cinematic medium vis-à-vis other avant-garde, non-narrative, or abstract artistic expressions. Two weeks before this particular thematic unit, students were asked to turn in a 2-3 paragraph response about how they would adapt other abstract artistic expressions from different media (written, audio, and visual) to cinema (Appendix E.vi). The following week, when we discussed these films in class, students remarked that although the films were challenging to discuss and understand, the activity was useful since it allowed them to think from an avant-garde director's point of view and invited them to explore the artistic limits of film in their own ways, providing them a unique approach and framework to understanding the complex artistic expressions and sensations that the films we studied attempted to convey.

To motivate my students' interests and further their comprehension of our weekly topics, films, and readings, I designed and maintained a course website using a web space offered through Google. The CINE 388 Course Site is a thorough and comprehensive database that includes an interactive syllabus with links to both required and supplementary readings, as well as the Clip Archives, Still Image Archives, and Weekly Reviews that I created after each week of class (Appendix F). The Clip Archives offer many clips of different sequences or

scenes that are significant to the overall comprehension of the films; likewise, the Still Image Archives organize a collection of pertinent and meaningful images from each film. Furthermore, I wrote detailed weekly reviews that provide thorough summaries of each week's lecture by professor Solomon, notes and orientations for the required and supplementary readings, and recapitulations of our weekly discussions on the feature film(s) that often push our discussions beyond the limitations imposed by the 80-minute discussion session. The Course Site proved an invaluable resource not only for my students, but also for all of the students in the course as the Spanish-section students accessed and even cited my Course Site on their weekly worksheets.

My high standards for preparation of class and professional attitude are reflected in overwhelmingly positive teacher evaluations. All 18 students in my SPAN 130 class recognized my willingness to help outside of the classroom and my availability, particularly noting on several occasions my quick and thorough responses to emails. Similarly, every student commented that the goals for the class were explicitly set out and that the work in the class was geared towards the achievement of these goals. Other characteristic feedback included comments on my high level of knowledge of Spanish language and Hispanic culture, my superior skills in presenting materials and answering questions, my professional attitude and demeanor in and out of class, and the thorough organization of the class. See Appendix G.i for direct quotes from the students.