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Statement of Teaching Experience and Philosophy

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Teaching Objectives: As a teacher of Italian language and Italian and comparative literature, my goals are necessarily various, yet there is a throughline in my ultimate objectives. While my specific aims in the language classroom revolve around language-learning achievement via the study of authentic cultural materials, and in the literature classroom they focus on improvement of critical literary/cultural inquiry and writing ability, I have found that the ultimate goal is singular: that students learn to understand and express their own experience, comprehend others', and interpret and evaluate those experiences with a generous and democratic mind. I believe that young people today – who, due to climate change and technological advances, are faced with unprecedented uncertainty regarding their futures, and will face ethical dilemmas that must be treated at the individual, national and global scales – need, more than ever, an education focused on citizenship and self-reflection, which only good humanities courses can provide.

Language Teaching Methods: In the first three semesters of language classes, and continuing to a certain extent into the intermediate levels, my classroom activities are communicative and task-based. My syllabi require that students study the pertinent chapter material (particularly grammar and vocabulary) before coming to class, which allows us to take advantage of our in-class community during the period to bring the lessons alive through interaction with each other and non-textbook media. My in-class materials seek, not to dispute the textbook vision of Italy, which I find often to be idealized, but, rather, to enhance it with a less romantic, yet more inclusive, look at the contemporary Italian reality. For example, a chapter that talks about Milan and fashion has been complemented in past courses by an introduction to the ecological threat produced by 'fast fashion' and/or the status of migrant workers in the fashion industry. Depending on the level of the course, we have focused on vocabulary and our own relationships with fashion and ecological choices, presenting our own outfits and why we chose each article; or we have watched a clip from *Gomorra* and read/discussed a short article about Roberto Saviano and his work. A chapter devoted to 'Italianità' may work with Francesco DeGregori's 'Viva l'Italia' and Ghali's 'Cara Italia', asking students beforehand to make a list of words they associate with 'Italianità', then, at the end of the module, depending on the level, adding a verse to De Gregori's anthem, writing and reciting their own short poem or song, and/or discussing in groups what an initial and final list of 'l'identità americana' descriptors might look like.

As my courses advance from the beginning to the intermediate and advanced levels, course activities and materials begin to look more and more like those utilized in literature/culture courses. Yet, I have devised some useful methods that remain unique to the language classroom. For example, in my fourth-semester 'Radio Italia' course, 'note taking' proved to be particularly fruitful. In each class, I give a brief lecture, accompanied by power points, and part of the students' final grade is a quarterly review of the in-class notes they take, which they are allowed to enhance (in different colored ink) with research online of key words/events they had not understood during the lectures. This encouraged students to listen and take notes as they would in an SL1 course and to fill lacuna of their understanding at home, by using wikipedia.it or other websites. In that same course, student presentations across the semester were informative and imaginative, culminating in a final group project in which students recorded a radio broadcast (it could also be done as a live department event) in which they introduced and played a set list and discussed relevant socio-historical events pertaining to the songs they'd chosen.

Literature Teaching Methods:

Teaching Assessment:

Students learn differently, and therefore, I feel it is important to give a wide range of assessments. From writing and revising compositions, to creating and performing short plays in class, to organizing critical thinking roundtables, students can shine where they are strongest and improve their weaker areas. Exams test four skills; every exam includes a listening/watching portion, a reading and response portion, and a grammar/vocabulary portion. Separate oral exams ask students to create and upload recording in which they either read a piece of text or else listen to a set of spoken sentences and repeat them. Student evaluations help me understand my course's strengths and weaknesses and organize my syllabi and class time accordingly. No matter the strength of my evaluations, however, I am truly satisfied only when students come back for more, beyond their language citation or literature prerequisite. I have met my goals when they return to my classes, to find me at my regular office hours even when they are not in my classes, or contact me to ask for a book recommendation in Italian or to tell me that something we discussed in class has stayed with them and guided or sustained them in their lives since graduation.

LITERATURE/CULTURE TEACHING GOALS, ENACTMENT, AND ASSESSMENT:

When I arrived at Harvard in 2011, I already knew that I would write my dissertation on Fabrizio De André, for my experience as an English teacher in Italy had shown me that students' interest in English was most often sparked by the musicians and bands they loved, from the Rolling Stones to Beyoncé. I theorized that part of what was lacking in the United States was young people's awareness of absolutely compelling Italian musicians who, like Bob Dylan, had renewed, and continue to renew, youths' love of poetry. This lack of awareness speaks, certainly, to a larger, and potentially disastrous, national self-interest and dearth of multiculturalism in the United States today. However, it also points to a parallel yet distinct trend in the humanities, writ large. That is, even in the English language, students have lost interest in texts, particularly those from the past. In every department I have taught in, faculty meetings have been concerned with 'increasing class sizes' and 're-engaging student interest in the humanities'. While we cannot control or change some of the realities that have left us with dwindling class sizes (earning wage gaps), I believe some changes are, indeed, ours to make.

For this reason, since the beginning of my tenure as a university teacher, bridging the gap of interest—between what I saw my students voluntarily consume and what we are offering in literature and culture classes—has been a primary concern. I currently teach in a World Literatures and Cultures program, so my syllabi are necessarily comparative. However, the comparative nature of my past and proposed courses in Italian departments – when it comes to comparisons across time and media, and as often as possible language/national borders as well – comes from my belief that many more students will be interested in the past if it is compelling related to their present experience. Thus, in an Italian department, I would still teach Dante through Borges, as the Argentinian agnostic-modernist gives students a more-familiar perspective through which to approach the *Divine Comedy*. It allows us to ask, concretely, what is still universal, what is still meaningful, what is still cutting-edge about Dante's cosmos today?

I have found in my research that the most interesting moment exists at the point of contact between two or more peoples, nations, languages, time periods, or media. I consider that space a frontier, a no man's land where the rules of one's own society are either suspended or in conflict with the rules of another's land or language. I believe that same space can be opened up in the classroom, a liminal space where students are able to step out of their own conceptions and assumptions, where they can

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For example, the Humanities fields tell students they will be instructed in citizenship and self-reflection and yet we do not yet deal adequately with the ethics of climate-change or self-conceptions within this new global construct. I, myself, am still struggling to find course materials and create class discussions around this topic, even as my students clamor for it. Yet, the principle short-term goal of my development as a professor is to better prepare my students to be responsible citizens and non-alienated individuals in a world with an uncertain future.

NEAR END, INCLUSIVITY Through introduction to a foreign language and/or culture, language and literature studies foster conditions in which students come up against possibly radical changes of perspective, and it is of utmost importance to my teaching philosophy that students feel safe to question and experiment without judgment, that they feel encouraged to view the world more inclusively with every introduction to newness, and that they, finally, take that expanded viewpoint with them along their life path. As students are overcoming the initial challenges of learning language in my classroom, they are introduced concurrently to a new culture, in a framework that reflects, rather than surveils. Whether the class is an introductory-language or a literature course, I encourage students to contemplate their own beliefs and the cultural norms with which they have been raised, so as to stimulate greater open-mindedness and understanding. For example, in my third-semester Italian class that deals with four mixed-media genres, we end the course with a discussion of the Wild West in Italian comics and Spaghetti Western films. The uncanny nature of the Italian version of the West, the sometimes-glaring stereotypes and historical misrepresentation has generated conversations that question the myth as it exists in the US, as well as Italy, and the socio-political reasons for which US might export such a myth.

Teaching Experience: I have taught Italian language at the college level since the fall of 2013 (at Harvard and the University of Southern California) and before that I lived in Italy for nearly five years (2006-2010) and was an English-language teacher as well as the English program director at AICI (Associazione Interculturale Italo-Irlandese) in Rome. I have also taught two summers of intensive Italian with the Harvard Summer School's Milan and Siena program (2016-17). As a language teacher, my main objective is that students achieve level-appropriate competence in L2 reading, writing, listening and speaking through the practice and development of their interpretative, presentational and interpersonal communication skills in Italian. Of equal importance to me are the cultural aims in my courses, as I believe it is essential that language skills be taught through the introduction of and interaction with authentic cultural materials that present a realistic and up-to-date Italy.

I have been a teaching assistant for literature courses since 2013 and have been a professor of literature courses since Fall 2018. As a teaching assistant, under Jeffrey Schnapp and Francesco Erspamer, I have taught the *Divine Comedy*; an experimental design/digital humanities course in which I developed and led a studio at the Graduate School of Design at Harvard rather than a literature discussion section; and an aesthetical and critical inquiry course in which we read *Piacere*, *Il principe*, *Le città invisibili*, and Elaine Scarry's *On Beauty and Being Just*. As a professor of Comparative Literature in the University of Michigan Society of Fellow's Tsinghua-Michigan program, I have taught Postcolonial literature, in which the primary texts are *The Heart of Darkness*, *Tempo di uccidere*, *Regina di fiori e di perle*, *Between the World and Me*, and *Io, venditore di elefanti*, and secondary texts include essay by Ania Loomba, Edward Said, Lucia Re, Franz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Maya Angelou. I have taught the *Divine Comedy*, called "The Power and Limits of Sight: Rereading the *Divine Comedy* with Borges", in which we read a comprehensive selection of the *Divine Comedy* during the first ¾ of the class, many of the readings accompanied by Borges' essays on Dante, and then in the final module we read Borges' short story, "The Aleph", and consider the modern, even contemporary, implications of Dante's work in the light of Borges' essays and short story.