

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Sahana Narayanan, and I'm a junior in Columbia College studying Comparative Literature and Society. I took both fall and spring semesters of Contemporary Civilization with Ignacio.

Having always done well in my humanities classes, I entered my sophomore year feeling very confident in my writing and communication abilities. Throughout the year, Ignacio initiated a process that rebuilt the way I think and write. I am forever grateful that I had a professor honest and kind enough to not only invest time in teaching and giving initial feedback, but also in reconstructing the processes of thought and logic required before even placing pen to paper, thereby enlightening us of the invaluable tool that is our own self-awareness.

By no means was Ignacio's class an easy experience. I had peers in CC classes whose teachers did not even require them to buy the books for the class, and gave them high grades on all assignments, while they were not required to participate in class. However, I think that they missed out on the following experiences:

Ignacio was very tuned into the class dynamic. To encourage self-regulation, he would give us a ball to pass to each other. We were directed to pass the ball to those that had spoken the least in the class. He did not shy away from controversial topics. In fact, after a discussion of the content, he would ask us how those ideas applied to inviting provocative speakers on campus, theories of gender and race, and what we would do if we found burgeoning life on another planet (is it our duty to conquer because we are more "powerful," or do we observe from afar?) Although we met on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6-8 PM, when everyone was tired and hungry, rarely did I leave the class not stewing over something that Ignacio or a classmate brought up. I think that the mark of a good teacher is one who doesn't proclaim to know all the answers- and despite being highly qualified as an academic and professional, Ignacio was comfortable with saying "I don't know." Although there may be discrete answers or arguments apparent in the text, I realized that the complexities of our internal subjectivities are such that it would take lifetimes to even be aware of how such discussions resonate in how we walk in the world. I am still processing and integrating the ideas from CC into my classes this year. Throughout the course of the year, Ignacio showed us that to accept that we don't know all the answers, perhaps, is the beginning of the journey.

We had weekly writing assignments that asked us to develop certain aspects of an argument from the text. We were asked to pay close attention to the steps of such arguments, and were expected to reproduce these thought processes on finals and midterms, where Ignacio pooled questions from these homework assignments. However, his examinations required us to memorize the specificities of such arguments in short answer sections, and then to add our own interpretation in long essay form. Our class, aware of the difficulty of Ignacio's examinations (despite the fact

that the questions were from our homework), would come together and create 40 page long study guides, where we each shared the written answers that we had submitted for our homework. To know and integrate the information that we have produced is one thing, but to rely on someone else's writing requires a certain amount of trust. Although Ignacio never explicitly forced collaboration upon us, his style of teaching required us to build connections with one another. He also supported us through extensive guidelines (sometimes over 5 pages) for the essays and written assignments. I was very inspired by his labor and attention to detail.

Furthermore, Ignacio included texts that were not on the syllabus, such as Descartes Meditations. My favorite writing assignment was one in which he tied "Cogito ergo sum" to a quote by Master Yoda from Star Wars. On the one hand, he required me to be extremely articulate, pushing me both in class and in written feedback on where I failed to provide a convincing argument, or where my thoughts seemed confused and haphazard. On the other hand, he told me to keep the flame and interest in the material alive. In a sense, it was the ultimate Cartesian challenge: to balance self-critical objectivity against my own writing- the literal personification of my inner voice- with the realities of how certain texts affect us in subtle ways, or even the facts of change and movement in our personal lives, and how we subconsciously bring those energies to the academic setting.

CC with Ignacio was perhaps the most difficult class I've ever taken, but I have never been so transformed by a class in such obvious ways. I received a B in the first semester, and was severely disappointed, never having received lower than an A- in a humanities class before. I was forced to rethink and to adapt. Although being fascinated by the material presented in first semester, I was still not honest enough with myself to reflect upon my habits of thinking and writing. After first semester, the reconstruction process began. For my class presentation and midterm paper, I chose to present on Kant's Preface to the Critique of Pure Reason, one of the hardest topics of the semester and one that I believe Ignacio added to the syllabus. Determined to not repeat my mistakes of first semester, I reached out to Ignacio several times about the material. Each time, he promptly responded and met with me in person, clarifying the content and giving me feedback on how I would need to flesh my argument out in order to make a convincing claim. For my midterm essay, I put Kant and Hume's theories about the productions of knowledge, beliefs of human cognition, and theories of aesthetics and beauty, in conversation with my own ideas about music, space, and time. Specifically, I argued that the act of listening or creating music may be understood as an objective interaction mediated by our senses of space and time, implying that not only objective knowledge is feasible, but music may exist in a special realm because it's architectural features of pitch and rhythm correspond to our own internal structures of space and time. I received a better grade for that essay- but I also took Ignacio's feedback more seriously than I would have if I had been getting good grades all along. While he applauded me for tackling a tough subject, he was still honest about the areas of improvement. As a singer, violinist, and student of music, I cannot emphasize enough how my reflections on the material through Ignacio's guidance, CC discussions, and the process of writing that midterm

essay has had such deep implications. Before- I may have simply played music. Now, I'm interested in the philosophy of music and intellectual property, copyright laws, and am even taking a class entitled "Techniques and Tools for Critique of Digital Music," where the thought processes required for this paper inform my critique of modern music-making methods, the entertainment industry, and the visualization through technologies of aesthetic and sonic form. None of this growth would have been possible without Ignacio.

While CC is a very theoretical class, Ignacio invests in his student's grounding in the real world. After the year long class had ended, he gave us information on volunteering for Rethink, a philosophy outreach program that hosts CC-like discussions with marginalized groups in facilities such as the Osborne Association and Rikers.

All in all, Ignacio went above and beyond in his position as a CC teacher. He is more than qualified for any lecturer position, and will sincerely devote his time and energy to the intellectual prosperity of his students.