

**VISUAL MEMORY/MEMORIAS VISUALES:  
COLLECTIVE MEMORY & VISUAL MEDIA  
IN SPAIN AND LATIN AMERICA**

**Innovations in Teaching and Learning Grant: 2015**

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The aims of the ITL grant proposal were three-fold: to personally develop new areas of expertise in order to expand my curricular offerings, to design and teach an innovative advanced visual media seminar course in the Spanish Department, and to create a permanent departmental visual media lending library for student use. Successful implementation of each of these components is discussed below.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:**

My 2015 summer was devoted to in-depth, pedagogically-oriented research that allowed me to expand my academic training in two significant ways. My PhD is in 20<sup>th</sup> century Latin American literature (text-based works) and I was hired at Whitman in a very different department (FLL) that sought an expert in that field. With the support of the ITL grant, I challenged myself to be prepared to teach multiple modes of visual media (going beyond text-based sources) in response to the Spanish Civil War (broadening the scope of my work to a different continent). Not only did *Visual Memory/Memorias visuales* require that I teach distinct visual modalities with each unit in the course (photography, photojournalism and propaganda art, areas requiring their own theoretical literature), the course additionally entailed delving into the highly contested collective memory debates within Spain regarding the Civil War, the Franco regime and the nation's transition to democracy. While this field in many ways remains parallel to my ongoing work in the post-dictatorship Argentine cultural context, this demanded significant expansion of my expertise into a distinct social, political, historical and economic context. In the end, more than half of the course (seven weeks) were devoted specifically to this Peninsular context.

Significantly, the ITL grant supported my professional development as a teacher-scholar in ways that align with my vision of creating of an innovative Spanish program at Whitman. Traditionally Spanish departments have been founded upon geographic and temporal areas of expertise (for example, Peninsular Golden Age literature, Peninsular Medieval/Early Modern, Latin American colonial literature, Latin American contemporary literature). My vision, as I have overseen our transition, has been to create a department based primarily upon the study of genres (narrative, poetry, theatre/performance and a new visual literacy track which is described below) that does not artificially divorce Spain from Latin America and that does not compartmentalize time periods.

**COURSE CREATION: *Visual Memory/Memorias visuales* (Spanish 459) and**

**CURRICULAR INNOVATION: *Visual Literacies* (Spanish 344)**

*Visual Memory/Memorias visuales* (Spanish 459), offered in fall 2015, examines the roles of photography, photojournalism, graphic novels, film and other visual media (including propaganda poster art, World's Fair exhibitions, monuments and memorials) in articulating and preserving collective memory in Spain and Argentina. During the fall semester, nine advanced Spanish students (primarily Spanish majors and minors, though not exclusively – the course also attracted art majors) explored how nations are reimagined, recreated and redefined through popular culture and artistic works following periods of social, economic and/or political upheaval. This first iteration of *Visual Memory* was

strategically timed to coincide with the Sheehan Gallery's semester-long graphic novel exhibition and author visits/events that took place during the fall of 2015. The gallery exhibits as well as the numerous talks, performances and roundtables were directly integrated into the course.

In developing the syllabus I quickly realized that I had been far too ambitious in my proposed aims for a one-semester course. Initially I envisioned this class as first teaching the skills of visual literacy and then challenging students to apply their new skills to the cultural production of (post) Civil War Spain and post-dictatorship Argentina. I wanted students to consider the extensive and ongoing debates surrounding collective memory while simultaneously tracing the development of contemporary photography, examining the cinematic evolution from primarily propagandistic or documentary to popular and highly experimental films, and becoming familiar with the growing corpus of graphic literature in the field. But I soon realized that I could easily, and more successfully, create two distinct courses with the materials I had prepared myself to teach: one course focusing specifically on practical visual literacy skills (the semiotics of photography, the application of comics theory, filmic discourses) and another analyzing visual representations of the Spanish Civil war and the visual media denouncing the human rights violations of Argentina's "dirty war."

As such, I developed an advanced seminar course focusing on the visual media representing the two distinct historical events, while also creating an additional gateway course for the department, one focusing specifically on visual literacies. The Spanish Department, with great enthusiasm, approved the creation of Spanish 344 (to complement 341, 342 and 343) as part of our gateway sequence. These courses aim to teach critical thinking and academic writing in relation to the genres of poetry, theatre/performance and textual narrative respectively, preparing students for advanced seminar courses and the senior thesis project. Creation of this additional course will add a new line of inquiry to the Spanish curricula and alleviate much of our current enrollment pressures at this level (all majors and minors are required to take two courses in this sequence).

### **CREATION OF DEPARTMENTAL VISUAL MEDIA LENDING LIBRARY:**

To be sure, *Visual Memory/Memorias visuales* necessitated funding assistance for assigned materials in order to be equally accessible to all interested students. This was in fact the primary aim of the grant proposal. Without the availability of these materials on loan, the cost would be so prohibitive that the class simply would not be viable for all. Purchasing required course materials, costly visual and artistic texts (photojournalistic works, art books and graphic texts for example) that additionally must be shipped from abroad, presents a significant financial burden. By allowing students equal access to a library of otherwise unaffordable primary and supplemental visual texts, the grant simultaneously enhanced the quality of the study of visual media in Spanish and made that quality of experience equally accessible to all interested students.

As explained in the original proposal, to be fully appreciated and properly analyzed, visual works need to be read/seen, to the degree possible, in their original medium, layout design and context. For example, the reading of a graphic novel involves more than just the interaction of text and image—pacing (including when a page is turned), the texture of the paper, the quality of the coloring and many other elements work in combination to create desired effects. Photocopies, scans, online digital versions and other reproductions fail to capture the complexity of these visual works. To teach these artistic works well, it is essential that each student not only have read the work in advance but to also have a copy in hand during class discussion. However, these books are not readily available in the US, even through interlibrary loan or Amazon, and the cost of buying these works plus shipping them is prohibitive.

My proposed budget request would have allowed the department to purchase 12 copies of each text taught in the course. However, I did not receive full funding for this portion of the grant application and thus only approximately 3 copies of each text were able to be acquired. This did allow for each student to individually utilize the course materials in advance of class through course reserves at Penrose. However, the limited number of copies proved to be a constraint in the classroom. When asked to perform close visual readings of texts in class—whether assigned or supplemental—these exercises could only be carried out in a small group format and required the sharing of a single text among at least three students. Even so, students quickly learned to appreciate the difference in quality and reading experience between PDFs, online scans, photocopies and original visual texts and layouts and were grateful to have access to these materials.

A distinct advantage of having purchased these materials as a lending library available to Spanish students, is that all of these materials remain in the possession of the department. Not only does this allow for teaching future iterations of this particular course without a financial burden upon students, but the materials are also available to future students of the upcoming 344 Visual Literacy course and to students working on independent projects. For example, even as the library was in development these materials were already being lent out to seniors working on thesis projects.

In an effort to keep this visual media library up-to-date and allow for greater flexibility of teaching *Visual Memories/Memorias visuales* in the future as well as in an effort to meet ongoing student interests following the implementation of a new Visual Literacy track in the department, I shall request a modest budget increase to add a line in the Spanish Department specifically for the sustainability of this lending library.

I am most grateful for the support of the ITL grant which made it possible to undertake the initiatives described above. My pedagogy has been greatly expanded and enriched through focused study of the Spanish Civil War and immersive reading in the field of analyzing images. Formal student evaluations indicate that *Visual Memories* was a highly successful course that satisfied previously unmet student interests. I am confident that the addition of a *Visual Literacies* gateway course to the Spanish Department will likewise successfully strengthen and broaden our curricula. The departmentally sponsored lending library for students of Spanish visual media has already become a valued resource that allows these new curricular innovations to be affordable and accessible to all of our students.