

NOTE ON THE FIRST-YEAR SPANISH COURSE FOR OFFER HOLDERS

In your first year at Oxford you will prepare four Spanish papers. These aim to develop your linguistic and critical skills and your knowledge of the Spanish language and Hispanic literature (and culture more broadly), and they will be examined (the 'Preliminary Examination' in Spanish) at the end of Trinity Term (the summer term, third of three).

Paper I focuses on writing in Spanish and the end-of-year exam will consist of:

- (i) a translation from English into Spanish of a passage of about 250 words (called a 'prose'); and
- (ii) a set of twenty or so sentences to translate, again into Spanish, intended principally to test your knowledge of Spanish grammar. Tuition for this paper is organised centrally and you will be taught mainly by native speakers in classes with students from other colleges.

Paper II involves translating from Spanish and the exam will consist of two translations from Spanish into English ('unseens'). This paper is taught by me in a weekly class. As well as learning translation skills, we continue to work on Spanish grammar and vocabulary in this class. You will need a good bilingual dictionary (i.e., Spanish-English, English-Spanish), the set grammar book (see the enclosed reading list) and an exercise book or similar in which to note new vocabulary, which you must do systematically: a lack of vocabulary is one of the most common shortcomings at the end of the first year.

Paper III:

This paper consists of the close study of four works of prose fiction selected to offer a flavour of the huge variety of novels and short stories written in Spanish. The prescription (see the enclosed reading list) includes two texts by men and two by women, from Cuba, Mexico and Spain. You will have lectures on these texts throughout the year, not necessarily coinciding with your tutorials on them, which are taught by me. For these tutorials you will probably be in a pair or a group of three. Your lecturers will give you reading lists to help guide your secondary reading. Written work for this paper takes the form of essays. We will study these texts in Hilary Term (the second of three), but you should aim to read some of them during the summer before you come up to Oxford, as there is unlikely to be sufficient time during the Christmas vacation that precedes Hilary Term. In the exam, you will write three essays (covering three of the four texts).

Paper IV:

This paper introduces you to the poetry and drama of the Hispanic World, from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. As with paper III, you will have lectures spread across the year on these texts and – in addition – there will be some lectures on versification, since all but one of the texts are composed in verse. Whereas you will write essays for paper III, for this paper you will write commentaries (essentially, sustained close readings). There is no expectation that you will be familiar with this exercise prior to coming up to Oxford. Guidance will be provided and there will be plenty of opportunities to practise and to discuss. The exam involves writing three commentaries, one from each of the broad chronological periods – the medieval, the early modern

(‘Golden Age’), and the modern. We will begin this paper in Michaelmas Term (starting in October).

The enclosed reading list provides details of the prescribed editions. Please do try to obtain these specific editions if possible. They have been carefully selected on the basis of the quality of the scholarly apparatus they contain. If in doubt, please do feel free to get in touch with any queries.

Before coming up to Oxford, please read and familiarize yourself thoroughly with – at the very least – the ballads, the sonnets, *El médico*, and *Doña Rosita*. But reading beyond this would stand you in good stead. Make notes of those details (plot, themes, characters, images, etc.) that you find interesting, with a view to having a good working knowledge of the texts come October. It is important, too, to begin learning any unfamiliar vocabulary that these contain.

As you know, the learning of a language is a gradual business. You should take every opportunity to enrich your knowledge of Spanish by speaking the language when you have the chance, reading newspapers and watching or listening to news and other broadcasts, and noting down new vocabulary and words and phrases that you do not understand as you hear and read them. An active attitude to language acquisition and a willingness to go on learning is enormously helpful for a language student.

The literary side of the course will be new to many students and, although some feel uncertain as they undertake the reading, the vast majority of students at Oxford end up relishing this part of the course and the worlds it opens up. It can take some time and hard work to come to terms with the content and the demands of the literature papers and so it pays to be prepared. As well as reading the texts mentioned above, you should try to see and discuss Spanish plays and/or films and read something about the history and culture of Spain and Spanish America. Below are some suggestions that you may find helpful:

Raymond Carr (ed.), *Spain: A History* (OUP)

Roberto González Echevarría, *Latin American Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP)

Jo Labanyi, *Spanish Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP)

Peter Russell (ed.), *Spain: A Companion to Spanish Studies* (Routledge)

Edwin Williamson, *The Penguin History of Latin America* (Penguin)

If you have any questions about any of this, please do email me: roy.norton@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk

I’m looking forward to meeting you properly (i.e., not just on Teams!) in October. In the meantime, all good wishes for a pleasant summer.

Dr Roy Norton
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