

## **Balliol College Modern Languages: DR Diana Berruezo-Sánchez and Professor Elena Lombardi - video transcript**

The tutors, Dr Diana Berruezo-Sánchez and Professor Elena Lombardi, are seated, facing the camera. The tutors' names and course subject are shown the first time they appear. The tutors answer the questions that are displayed on screen.

>> DR DIANA BERRUEZO-SÁNCHEZ (CAREER DEVELOPMENT FELLOW IN MODERN LANGUAGES): I'm Diana Berruezo-Sánchez. I'm the Career Development Fellow in Spanish and tutor in Spanish here at Balliol. My area of research is the black African diaspora in early modern Spain.

>> PROFESSOR ELENA LOMBARDI (PROFESSOR OF ITALIAN LITERATURE, PAGET TOYNBEE LECTURER IN ITALIAN MEDIEVAL STUDIES, FELLOW AND TUTOR IN ITALIAN): I am Elena Lombardi. I'm the Tutor and Fellow in and in particular Dante's Divine Comedy. Italian and my area of research is the Middle Ages

[Question displayed on screen:]

### **What work do you give to students to prepare for tutorials?**

>> PROFESSOR ELENA LOMBARDI: Well, typically in Modern Languages we work with one text, one literary text, that's prose or poetry or it could also be a film over two weeks. Over these two weeks either in a seminar or a tutorial setting we will discuss first orally the text and then we will have typically an essay in which the student will answer some very general questions about the text and therefore be able to explore at length and in a very independent and often original way one work of literature at a time.

>> DR DIANA BERRUEZO-SÁNCHEZ: Along with literature, we also teach language and translation. More specifically, translation into English and translation into Spanish or French or Italian, and in those particular tutorials what we do is to set a translation they do it at home and then we comment on the day of the tutorial while also providing them with a set of tools for them to work on translations.

[Question displayed on screen:]

### **How are tutorials structured?**

>> DR DIANA BERRUEZO-SÁNCHEZ: Usually, tutorials in languages are structured in a way where we ask students what they think about the text in the first place, if they like it, if they don't, why they like it, why they don't, and then we go more into the specifics of the text that we analyse. This is something they've prepared beforehand, they've studied the text at length, they've attended lectures, they have produced an essay for the tutorial, so they're very well-equipped students with features and aspects to talk about. We talk at length about -sometimes it is specific, a text, sometimes it is broader, the the context in which this text is produced. At the end of the tutorial I usually ask them "What have you taken out of this tutorial?" and it's very nice to see that they always pick something relevant that the students take with them at home.

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>> PROFESSOR ELENA LOMBARDI: Yes, absolutely, and there are even from within a discipline, even within Modern Languages, there are many different ways to a tutorial, many different tutorial styles. Sometimes we read parts of the essay of the student together, sometimes we ignore the essay and just come up with completely different questions, sometimes we set the same question for everybody and sometimes questions are different for different students. Precisely the point is that a tutorial in Modern Languages is, I believe, transformative for both the student and the teacher, in that you walk in with a certain set of ideas and you walk out with those ideas being changed, or strengthened or modified in ways that are always interesting and creative, and those happen through the dialogue with your tutor but more importantly also with a dialogue with your fellow students.

[Question displayed on screen:]

### **How do you explore ideas with students?**

>> PROFESSOR ELENA LOMBARDI: We stay very close to the text, so we always have something, some words or some visual text in front of us. I think the technique that we employ more frequently is that of close reading, of textual analysis. This is the skill that we really nurture in our students. 'How do you read the text? How many meanings can you express from a line of poetry? From a paragraph of prose? From a sequence in a film? How much can you make it talk? How much can you allow yourself to be in dialogue with the text?' I think this is the way in which we mostly exchange ideas with our students, I believe.

>> DR DIANA BERRUEZO-SÁNCHEZ: Yeah, and it's very impressive, how starting from the text they zoom out and they bring their own ideas. Particularly for those students who are new to Modern Languages or Modern Languages and another subject, history or philosophy. So, starting from this very textual analysis they can relate it to their other fields, which is sometimes very good ways of exploring different ideas both for students and tutors.

[Question displayed on screen:]

### **What do you enjoy about conversations with students?**

>> DR DIANA BERRUEZO-SÁNCHEZ: What I enjoy the most with, you know, the conversations I have with my students is the way they change my understanding of the text we analyse and how they bring their own ideas. There are these very nice moments when I can see a click in their faces and I can see that they've changed their own understanding of the text because of the way we have analysed the poem or the text at hand, and these faces, these clicks, these little moments, are the most enjoyable part as a tutor.

>> PROFESSOR ELENA LOMBARDI: I enjoy the fact that there is no tutorial that is similar to the other. I've been at Balliol for many years now and I cannot name across the years, or in the same year, or in the same afternoon, a tutorial that is similar to the other, although I ask the same questions. And I do want to hear the same answer, the same pool of problems, but every tutorial is different and every tutorial has a different dynamic, has a different energy. I enjoy the moments of reflection, the moments of silence, even the awkwardness sometimes, as we are presented with an issue that we don't know how to handle entirely. I enjoy the sparks, I enjoy how different it is, really, every time.

[Question displayed on screen:]

### **How do students inform your own understanding of your subject?**

>> PROFESSOR ELENA LOMBARDI: A successful tutorial is a tutorial where I learn something from my students. Sometimes, I'm seen frantically taking a note as the students are talking because that is something that I want to return to or think about for my own research. More importantly is the broadening really of my horizons in conversation with bright young people and the sense that at the end, I've had a conversation but I don't feel like I've had a conversation, just the time has passed and we have shared some important reflections. Some of it will go in their learning, in my research, in something productive, but some of it will just remain the profound, quintessential, meaningful part of teaching that you know ultimately becomes part of ourselves.

>> DR DIANA BERRUEZO-SÁNCHEZ: The good thing about teaching Modern Languages here at Balliol is that we cover a broad syllabus. We cover a broad series of texts that are not always related specifically to our own research but still, by teaching them, you can always gain different approaches or different ways of seeing, ultimately, literature and then you take advantage of this or you learn from it and you apply it to your own research. Recently, the research I'm doing is the black African diaspora in early modern Spain, which is not something very much in the syllabus, but I did an exploratory tutorial with my students and I presented some text, and they made me realise that we need to work as researchers, we need to work on the text that we present, because they're not very well edited, they're not very accessible, so in presenting glimpses of your research, you realise of more research avenues that you have to carry out in the future.

[Question displayed on screen:]

### **What qualities do you look for and seek to develop in students?**

>> DR DIANA BERRUEZO-SÁNCHEZ: Mainly it's a passion for literature. That they engage with text, that they like reading them, they - as Elena was saying before - that they like to close read them. It's a very special relationship that you establish with the text and so a candidate that is really passionate about establishing this relationship.

>> PROFESSOR ELENA LOMBARDI: Yes. Curiosity, potential, passion, even different ways at looking at things. We don't require or desire any prerequisite knowledge. We don't particularly enjoy anything scripted or, you know, sounding particularly profound or complex. The real moment is when the candidate or the student sees their text and how much they enjoy it, how much energy, how much emotion, how much passion and especially curiosity they put in it, and also the capacity and desire of being led to learning. We don't mind people who make mistakes. Actually, sometimes the mistakes are very intelligent or very productive, but we look for people who learn from their mistakes and are ready to take things on board and to take them to the next level.

[Question displayed on screen:]

### **What is the best thing about teaching at Balliol?**

>> PROFESSOR ELENA LOMBARDI: Modern Languages at Balliol I think is a very happy, inclusive, community because Balliol is a happy and inclusive community, international, very open to dialogue and to exchange. Our students and our staff together make a group of very unconventional, very diverse and very inclusive people.

>> DR DIANA BERRUEZO-SÁNCHEZ: Students have this great insight of having - a great Dante scholar, a world-leading Dante scholar, teaching them as Elena is, teaching them in tutorials, and that gives also this international perspective to the text that that we are studying. And yes, very much the inclusivity and the diversity of the College, the community.

[Final page:]

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