



UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA

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portfolio submitted for the 2022 Excellence in Teaching Award

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Letter of Nomination



The University of Georgia

College of Arts and Sciences

Philosophy Department

January 11, 2022

Dear Members of the Awards Committee,

Please find enclosed the materials to support Michael Starling's nomination for the Excellence in Teaching Award for the academic year 2021/2022. Michael is a very strong student who advanced to candidacy in Spring 2021. His main philosophical interests lie in the area of Ancient Greek Philosophy. Michael entered our PhD program with prior teaching experience from Georgia Perimeter College (now Perimeter College at Georgia State University). Since Fall 2017, he taught 20 sections of different philosophy courses at the introductory and intermediate levels. Michael served as a teaching assistant for Phil 2010 (*Introduction to Philosophy*) and as solo instructor for Phil 2010 (*Introduction to Philosophy*), Phil 2010e (the online version of *Introduction to Philosophy*), Phil 2020 (*Logic and Critical Thinking*), and Phil 3000 (*History of Ancient Western Philosophy*). Michael is a truly excellent teacher who contributes in significant ways to teaching at UGA beyond his own assigned classroom responsibilities. He is a dedicated and enthusiastic teacher who considers teaching not just as a job, but also as a vocation. For his extraordinary achievements in teaching, he received the Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award in 2021. I strongly believe that Michael's achievements in teaching make him an ideal candidate for the Excellence in Teaching Award.

As you will see from Michael's teaching portfolio, his teaching achievements go well beyond his assigned duties in the classroom. One thing that ranks very highly, in my view, is the fact that Michael has been part of department's efforts to mentor our teaching assistants. Over the last couple of years, the department has assigned some large classes to our best teaching assistants. Since these classes are taught with teaching assistants, running the course also includes mentoring the teaching assistants. As the graduate coordinator, I have been able to observe the interaction between Michael and his teaching assistants very closely, and I have also read the reports from Michael's teaching mentors. It is clear that Michael does an exemplary job as a teaching mentor.

Michael has supported our departmental teaching mission also in other ways. For example, he spearheaded the development of the *Film and Philosophy Discussion Series* when he was President of the Philosophy Graduate Student Association. This series was very well-attended by both students and members of the Athens community, and Michael himself lead a number of discussions in this series. Michael was a tremendous help to both faculty and graduate students when UGA needed to move online due to Covid-19 in the Spring 2020. On the basis of his extensive experience with online courses, Michael was able to provide invaluable advice to faculty and graduate students. Michael met several times with faculty and graduate student to explain online teaching and help with technical questions. Michael also gave two presentations about online teaching for our teaching seminar (Phil 7010), one about how to organize an online course and the other about how to incorporate SWANK Digital Campus assets into eLC.

I am especially impressed by Michael's effort to teach philosophy outside of UGA. In the fall 2021, Michael has proposed and developed a philosophy course, as part of a Clemente Course in the Humanities, which he will teach at the Whitworth Women's Facility in May 2022.

As I mentioned above, Michael is an outstanding teacher. Much of our teaching in the Philosophy Department aims at developing important skills, such as the ability to argue, the ability to think clearly, and the ability to express ideas, thoughts, and arguments in written form. This process takes place in the context of exploring important ideas from various philosophical traditions. Developing these skills is a highly interactive process in which students not only discuss and critique ideas and arguments from other philosophers, but also question their own preconceptions and learn to form their own views. I say this here because it helps to appreciate the strength of Michael's approach to teaching. Like most philosophy courses, Michael bases his instruction on close readings of classical and contemporary texts. But he limits his lectures to a minimum and works though the arguments together with the students. Michael is very skilled at this. He manages to cover the main arguments in detail, while at the same time keeping the students excited about the material and involving virtually everyone in the discussion. Michael's extensive and deep philosophical knowledge, his careful and detailed course preparation, and his very impressive ability to ask pointed questions and give clear answers make him a highly successful teacher.

The tremendous success of Michael's approach to teaching is very clearly demonstrated in his teaching evaluations. As you can see from his teaching portfolio, Michael's quantitative evaluations are very high throughout all of his courses, and the students' comments on Michael's teaching style and on his courses are uniformly extremely positive. Michael cares deeply about his students and their progress. His students continuously emphasize his ability to encourage class discussion, foster critical thinking, make the material interesting and relatable, organize syllabus and classes well, and explain difficult concepts clearly. Students are equally positive about both Michael's in-person instruction and instruction via Zoom. What stands out for me in particular is Michael's admirable ability to relate to the students and his sustained efforts to present the material clearly and to make it relevant to the students. In their teaching observations, Michael's teaching mentors also

emphasize meticulous and thoughtful organization of his courses and the well-designed evaluation methods.

Michael is exploring and using a large number of innovative teaching techniques. He includes regular group work into his courses, such as practice exercises in which he asks students to identify premises and conclusion of short arguments, collaborative projects, and presentations on fallacies and cognitive biases. He also uses films in interesting and relevant ways and experiments with student-interest focused essay prompts. One particularly successful technique is the scaffolded writing process, which he used in his course Phil 3000 (Ancient Western Philosophy). Michael asked his students to write a 6–8-page research paper on a topic that interests or perplexes the student over the entire term. The process is divided up into five graded assignments: research proposal, annotated bibliography, paper outline, draft (which is peer reviewed), and final paper. I have started using a similar process only recently in one of my writing intensive courses. I can attest that this is very helpful and effective for philosophy, but it is also demanding on the teacher. Students often need significant guidance and help to complete these assignments, and I am impressed with Michael’s willingness to offer both.

Michael is making excellent progress towards the completion of his dissertation. As a member of his advisory committee, I have read his dissertation prospectus and was present at the prospectus defense in spring 2021. In his dissertation, Michael investigates the relationship between philosophy and political practice as it is manifested in the Platonic dialogues. His ultimate goal is to show that Plato’s philosophy is a deeply political practice. It is clear to me that his approach to teaching is informed by his thorough knowledge of Ancient Greek philosophy and shaped by his keen interest in political practice and issues concerning public discourse.

Let me conclude: Since fall 2017, Michael has made significant contributions to teaching in our department and at UGA. He is without a doubt a first-rate teacher. He is a very talented communicator who puts an enormous amount of time and effort into his courses. He is able to excite his students’ interest philosophy and explain philosophical arguments very clearly. Michael has been an incredible asset to the department’s teaching mission, and I strongly believe that he is an ideal candidate for the Excellence in Teaching Award.

Sincerely,



René Jagnow
Associate Professor
Graduate Coordinator
Department of Philosophy

Personal Statement

Hello! I am writing today in application for the Excellence in Teaching Award at the University of Georgia. I am a 6th year PhD student in the Department of Philosophy. In that time, I have served as a Graduate Teaching Assistant for 5 years, with 11 semesters as an Instructor of Record. In my role as a GTA, I have attempted to further the teaching mission of the Department of Philosophy and the broader University and Athens communities in various ways that go beyond the demands of my classroom responsibilities. I helped develop the first online courses in philosophy at UGA, spearheaded the development of public philosophy initiatives, and begun exploring external teaching opportunities which are oriented towards underserved communities in North Georgia.

My primary goal while teaching at UGA has been to improve the quality and concern of my engagement with my students. In *Teaching to Transgress*, the late bell hooks writes, “To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin. (p. 13)” I take this to mean that learning can only begin once I respect my students as whole human beings with interests and concerns that I may not share but which are ultimately fundamental to their being. In light of this, I have made a point of decentering myself in the classroom, emphasizing the importance of respectful discourse amongst students and instructor alike, expanding my teaching competencies to better represent the global nature of our discipline, and fostering an educational environment which is open to the nuance of the possibility of human experience.

In Summer 2019, I designed and taught the first Intro to Philosophy course to be offered online at UGA after participating in a proposal to teach summer courses online. This gave me some invaluable experience in using D2L/Brightspace and Kaltura, experience which I was able to share with my department in the pivot to online in March 2020 and later that year.

As President of the Philosophy Graduate Student Association during the ‘19-‘20 AY, I advocated for and spearheaded the development of public philosophy projects. My initial intent was to develop a philosophy education program for underserved communities in the area, but after running into some organizational issues, the PGSA decided to first establish a Philosophy and Film series. The October ‘19 screening of Ari Aster’s 2018 film *Hereditary* was our most successful event in this series, and I had the privilege of facilitating the discussion following the film. This series is currently on hold due to public health concerns, but other graduate students have begun strategizing its return.

After participating in the Future Faculty Fellows program this last calendar year and meeting like-minded educators, my interest in establishing external philosophy education opportunities was reinvigorated. I am lucky enough today to be approved and scheduled to teach an Intro to Philosophy course at Whitworth Women’s Facility (a long-term incarceration facility in N. GA) for Summer 2022. My hope is to establish a relationship between Common Good Atlanta (the parent organization) and the UGA Philosophy PhD program to combat the systemic barriers to higher education which so many in our community continue to face. Thank you for your time and consideration!

Teaching Philosophy Statement

As an undergraduate, I worked as a student DJ for WTUL, Tulane's student-operated progressive radio station. I've always loved music, but I found as a DJ that I really loved *sharing* my favorite tracks with my friends and my listening audience. I was never a DJ that talked over a song – I just enjoyed walking amongst the stacks of vinyl that WTUL had collected over the years, trying things out and sharing the records that I liked on-air. My favorite experiences were the times when someone called the radio station directly to ask “What was that song you just played?! That was incredible!” or “I’ve never heard of that band! I’ll have to go look for some more of their music!” Every time, their joy and enthusiasm invigorated my own interest, and the fact that I had some small part in manifesting that joy in someone’s life was deeply gratifying.

I don't DJ anymore, but I approach my teaching in the same way: I am consistently fascinated by the ideas that I encounter in the discipline, and I love sharing and examining these ideas with other people, especially my students, and seeing them connect deeply to a concept. When I first began teaching in 2014 at Georgia Perimeter College, I was working with primarily non-traditional students who had, for varied reasons, never had the opportunity to think with figures like Plato, Maimonides, or Hume. Each student had vastly different educational experiences than my own, and all of them brought those experiences to bear during our course, opening up mutually enriching conversations. Despite the novelty of the material, each of them at different points in the course was ‘drawn in’ to some theorist or idea. For instance, when talking about Maimonides’ *via negativa*, one student became very concerned with the possibility of free will if God is not lacking in knowledge. I asked if their significant other had a ‘usual order’ at a restaurant – something that they know the partner would order every time – and whether their knowledge of their partner’s order implied that their partner had no free will. They sat with that for the rest of the class and their papers in the course from that point onward focused on issues of free will.

Since then, my teaching goals have been to: empower students to take their education (and their lives) into their own hands by helping them identify the ideas that they often employ without understanding *why* they employ them; give them opportunities to reflect on the role that those ideas play in their lives; and foster an encouraging environment where they can develop their own perspectives in concert with each other.

To those ends, my classroom strategy has developed into a mixture of lecture and discussion: I go through the text asking the students cultural and historical questions so that they can bring their varied knowledge to bear, and I use their answers to contextualize the ideas in the text (e.g. making sense of Socrates’ claim in the *Apology* that death is not something to be feared). After establishing the context and all of the basic claims, I put students in small groups and give them guiding questions that have been

designed to scaffold their understanding of the material (e.g. “What are the political implications of Socrates’ statement that he will not stop practicing philosophy, even if threatened with death?”). These questions let the students restate the concept at hand, tentatively seek coherence with other major ideas within the work, and finally provide their own original analysis.

My assignments are designed in a similar way: I often use written assignments with prompts (e.g., “What does Freire mean by claiming that education is ‘necrophilous?’”) that are designed to encourage the student to recapitulate the argument, implement it, and then wrestle with potential problems. When I teach courses that are more formal, such as Logic and Critical Thinking, my assignments alternate between skill refinement (e.g. practice identifying argument structures) and reflective opportunities (e.g. “Are college students morally responsible for repaying their educational loans? Give an argument using an inductive strategy from Chs. 3-6.”).

Every time I enter the classroom to teach, I play an album that I love over the stereo as I get situated. I do this for a few reasons: it creates a welcoming and open atmosphere that helps facilitate learning, it discreetly establishes a connection with the students by letting them know something about me outside of the classroom context, and most importantly it reminds me of the reason why I decided to pursue a career in philosophy education in the first place – to share and explore ideas that befuddle, inspire, and delight me with a diverse group of thinkers eager to wonder at the world.

Description of Courses Taught at UGA

As Instructor of Record

PHIL2010: Introduction to Philosophy

Terms: Fall '18, Spring '19, Fall '20, Fall '21

Enrollment: Fall '18 & Spring '19 – 35 students per section, 2 sections per semester. Fall '20 & '21 – approximately 100 students.

Description: This course is a historical survey of philosophical accounts which offer answers to the course’s guiding question “What is the value, purpose, and function of education?”, usually with a focus on epistemology and. The course includes readings from outside the Western philosophical “canon” and encourages students to interrogate their preconceptions about their own educational experiences.

Responsibilities: In addition to selecting the course theme and pertinent readings from public domain sources and OERs, I dedicated Friday sections to center student discussion. I designed assignments and quizzes to scaffold student comprehension of

course material and gave critical feedback to help students develop their writing skills, in addition to grading. In Fall '20 and '21, I also supervised and mentored graduate TAs who were responsible for facilitating Friday discussion sessions and grading.

PHIL2010e: Introduction to Philosophy (online)

Terms: Summer '19, '20, and '21

Enrollment: Approximately 40 students per section, 1 section per semester.

Description: (same as above)

Responsibilities: I created short (10-20 minutes on average) pre-recorded lecture videos using Powerpoint presentations and Kaltura to be presented in an asynchronous format and employed eLC's Discussion Board feature to approximate classroom discourse. Not only did I facilitate discussion on this platform, answering minor clarifying question for the students and offering more readings, but I also read and responded to weekly 1-page writing assignments designed to allow the student to express and attempt to resolve their confusion about a reading.

PHIL2020: Logic and Critical Thinking

Terms: Spring '20, '21, and '22

Enrollment: Spring '20 and '21, 10-35 students per section, 2 sections per semester. Spring '22, 70 students.

Description: In this course, we focus on developing skills in argument analysis, formal and informal reasoning, and argumentation. The course centers in-class exercises and activities, with projects and assignments focusing on the application of the students' analytical skills to their own belief systems and real-world issues.

Responsibilities: I selected the course textbooks, designed in-class assignments around exercises from the textbooks and other sources as well as take-home assignments based on skill implementation and consolidation, conducted lectures, and facilitated in-class issue-based discussions with the students about seminal philosophical works such as Thomson's *A Defense of Abortion* and Marquis's *Why Abortion is Immoral*. In Spring '22, I am mentoring and supervising a Teaching Assistant who will be selecting articles to be used for the issue-based discussions.

PHIL3000: Classics of Ancient Western Philosophy

Term: Fall '19

Enrollment: 18 and 32 students in each of the 2 sections.

Description: This course was centered on close readings of three middle/late dialogues from the Platonic corpus, highlighting Plato's metaphilosophical concerns and peculiar methods of inquiry.

Responsibilities: I prepared lectures and discussion questions centered on close readings of the selected texts, utilizing class time to work through the assigned material with students and contextualize complex concepts and clarify arguments in the text. After attending some split-level courses in philosophy, I noted that many undergraduates expressed feeling lost when it came to developing and writing research paper in the discipline, so for this course I designed the assignments to scaffold the process of writing a research paper in philosophy, from the development of a topic appropriate to philosophical methods to locating and analyzing secondary literature and how to give good feedback in peer-review sessions.

As Teaching Assistant

PHIL2010: Introduction to Philosophy

Terms: Fall '17, Spring '18

Enrollment: Approximately 100 students in both semesters.

Course Description: This course was a lecture and discussion focused survey of the major thinkers in the Western philosophical tradition. Readings were not focused on particular themes but designed to show the development of Western thought from the pre-Socratics to John Stuart Mill, and was inclusive of ethics, metaphysics, political philosophy, and epistemology.

Responsibilities: As a TA for Dr. Thanassis Samaras, I attended M/W lectures, held weekly office hours for student mentoring and tutoring, facilitated Friday discussion sessions (including designing activities and questions based on course content), and was responsible for the bulk of grading in the course.

Sample Teaching Materials and Student Work Sample

PHIL2020

Bi-Weekly Assignment #5: Real-World Complex Argument Analysis

Due: March 26, 2021

For this assignment, please watch *Slaying the Dragon: Reloaded* and write a short analysis of and reflection on (1-2 pages total) the documentary's overarching argument regarding the portrayal of Asian women in Hollywood and western media generally.

Your analysis should include type of argument given, argument strategies implemented, and general assessment of the strength of these arguments based on the criteria covered in *A Rulebook for Arguments*.

Your reflection should include an argument (as defined in our textbook) which explains and defends your position. In your reflection, you might consider the following questions:

"This update to the original 1988 documentary was released in 2011; in the decade since its release, do you think that the Western film and television industry has made any meaningful changes (positive or negative) to its portrayal of Asian women (and, by extension, Asian men)? Why do you think that?"

"How might the increasingly broad reception of international film industries (e.g., those of South Korea, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Nigeria, and Iran are particularly strong) in Western markets help (or hurt!) attempts to address the issue of racial/ethnic/religious/gender stereotyping in film? Explain your reasoning."



PHIL2020: Analysis of Complex Arguments

In response to the terrorist shootings which targeted women of Asian descent at Atlanta businesses on March 16, 2021, I scrapped a planned assignment on argument analysis and designed the following assignment to inform students of the issues underlying the attacks. They were given 1 week (assigned March 19th) to watch the 30-minute documentary and analyze its arguments. The documentary was made accessible on eLC via SWANK Digital Campus.

PHIL3000 Peer Review Activity

Start with a Principle of Charity

- Suspend premature judgments about the person and their argument.
- Disagree with the direction it seems to be going in? That's fine. But first *let them lay their thoughts on the table.*
- What does it seem like they are trying to say?
- Give them the benefit of the doubt and interpret things as charitably as possible.



For this activity, the students had already completed 4 stages in the process of writing a 6–8-page research paper on a topic of their choice from the selected texts. Students were expected to bring a rough draft to a regular 75-minute session of the course dedicated to having students pair up, exchange papers, and give

each other critical feedback and comments to be used on the final draft of their paper. In order to make sure that these comments were constructive, I created a brief (5 minute) presentation emphasizing the most important aspects of writing critical feedback in philosophy. I remained in the room to answer questions and give guidance as well as schedule times for students to meet with me for further feedback on their papers. Included are some slides from the presentation.

What are they arguing?



Ask yourself the following questions:

- “What is their thesis?”
- “What is their evidence?”
- “Does their evidence support their conclusion?”

If you cannot answer one or more of these questions, bring this up to your peer – ask for clarification!

Innovative Teaching Projects and Roles

Scaffolded Term Papers for Intermediate Philosophy courses

After taking several split-level (4000/6000) philosophy courses as a graduate student, I noticed undergraduate students in those courses expressing frustration with the open-ended nature of philosophical writing and research projects, especially when they were responsible for producing one as a term paper. I decided to try a scaffolded assignment approach in my intermediate PHIL3000 course to assist the students in developing their own projects, thinking that they could apply a similar process in more advanced courses. Throughout the semester at regular intervals, students had to submit: a topic proposal to be approved by me; an annotated bibliography of relevant secondary sources, including

some explanation of how they expected those sources to figure into their paper; a detailed paper outline, including thesis statement and argument structure; a rough draft of the paper; participation in a 75-minute peer-review session of said rough draft; and the final draft submitted as their term paper. The results were rigorous and fascinating expressions of each student's ideas about the course material. It was a privilege to help students develop their writing and analytical skills over the course of the semester and is an approach that I plan on using with further augmentation in future intermediate courses.

PHIL2010e Online Course Development

In the 2016-2017 academic year, the Philosophy Graduate Student Association (PGSA) began the process of petitioning the department to offer summer online courses in order to increase teaching opportunities during the summer months. I assisted in drafting the proposals for those courses, including PHIL2010e, PHIL2020e, and PHIL2030e. After these courses were approved by the department and submitted to be added to the course catalog, I was assigned the first PHIL2010e class to be taught at UGA in summer 2019. I designed the course (after a consultation with experts in the Center for Teaching and Learning) from scratch to be an asynchronous, discussion-based course.

Pivot to Online (Spring '20)

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached a fever pitch in March 2020, I was one of 3 GTAs in our department who had experience teaching completely online, and so became a natural choice to advise and assist in the rest of the department's pivot to online teaching. This occurred at the same time that I was pivoting my own PHIL2020 class. While it was challenging, I saw it as an opportunity to explore the options afforded by eLC and Kaltura, and alongside my peers gave multiple Zoom presentations explaining my personal approach as well as options that I had not implemented at that time. In addition, I had several meetings with faculty throughout the Spring and following Summer semester advising them on eLC and Kaltura implementation for the Fall '20 semester.

Student Interest Focused Assignments

In addition to the sample assignments above, I regularly employ assignments that center student issues and needs. E.g., the final term paper for my Spring '21 PHIL2020 course required students to write 2 complex arguments (one in the affirmative, and one in the negative) in answer to one of the following prompts of their choice:

- Is illegally downloading your college textbooks morally wrong?
- Should student athletes be paid?
- Are you morally responsible for the student loans that you take out to attend college?

Students were asked not to indicate which side of the issue they actually landed – they were to give rigorous arguments on both sides and present each argument as response to the other. This gave students the opportunity to do research on this hot-button issues that they will certainly encounter in their careers, develop an understanding of the arguments on either side of the debate, apply the skills they had been developing throughout the semester, and appreciate the complexity of writing rigorous philosophical arguments.

Clemente Course in the Humanities @ Whitworth Women’s Facility

In March 2020 just before the COVID-19 pandemic, our department head Dr. Meskin and I met with Dr. Caroline Young, a lecturer in the English Department here at UGA and an instructor partnered with Common Good Atlanta. We discussed briefly the possibility of our graduate students teaching a summer section of a Clemente Course in the Humanities, a program which offers college credit through Bard College to “non-traditional” and non-affiliate students. After a delay in getting this up and running due to the onset of the pandemic, I am excited to be teaching Introduction to Philosophy as a part of this program at Whitworth Women’s Facility in Summer 2022. I have been approved by both Clemente and Common Good Atlanta to teach this course using an adjusted version of my PHIL2010 course described above. I am especially excited because these students will have work from their Arts section of the Clemente Course displayed alongside parts of their final essays for my course in an exhibit at The Georgia Museum of Art in Spring 2023.

Professional Activities Related to Teaching

Honors and Awards

- 2021 Outstanding Teaching Assistant Award, Graduate School, University of Georgia
- 2021 Future Faculty Fellow, Center for Teaching and Learning @ UGA
- 2020 J.M. Green and R.K. Green Graduate Fellowship

Departmental Service

- 2020-2021 Graduate Student Moderator, Philosophy Graduate Student Association
- 2019-2020 President, Philosophy Graduate Student Association
- 2018-2019 Secretary, Philosophy Graduate Student Association
- 2017-2018 Treasurer, Philosophy Graduate Student Association

Presentations and Workshops

- 2021 TA Café Facilitator: “Making Teaching Fun”, CTL @ UGA (10/28/21)
- 2021 TA Café Facilitator: “Teaching Portfolio Peer Exchange”, CTL @ UGA (4/28/21)
- 2020 “Incorporating SWANK Digital Campus Assets into D2L/Brightspace Courses”
- 2020 “Preparing to Pivot: eLC Functionality and Tools” (3/19/20)
- 2019 *Hereditary* Film Screening and Discussion Facilitator (10/17/19)
- 2019 “Overview of PHIL2010e Structure and Strategies” for PHIL 7010 (9/23/19)

Special Training and Teaching-Related Experience

Teaching Related Coursework

- Fall 2017 PHIL7010: Teaching Philosophy Seminar (various instructors)

Conference and Workshop Attendance

- 2021 TA Café: Fostering Student Well-Being, CTL @ UGA (9/23/21)
- 2020 Philosophizing with High School Students Workshop (2/15/20)
- 2020 Philosophizing with Young Children Workshop (2/12/20)
- 2020 TA Café: Writing Diversity Statements, CTL @ UGA (2/4/20)
- 2020 Spring Teaching Symposium, CTL @ UGA
- 2018 Spring Teaching Symposium, CTL @ UGA
- 2018 Teaching Philosophy Workshop, APA Eastern Division Meeting

Other Training

- In progress Certificate in Diversity and Inclusion, HRT&D Department at UGA
- 5/6/2021 UGA Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy Dept. Training

Teaching Evaluations from Students

Selected Qualitative Feedback for PHIL3000 (Fall 2019)

Honestly one of the most competent and knowledgeable philosophy professors I've ever had. He knows the material like the back of his hand and is really good at guiding the students through the material along the way. Especially since the material is so damn

complicated, but he does an outstanding job and guiding us through it while also facilitating questions and discussion. Also very friendly and funny, treats students as equals.

I do not necessarily think the course is demanding in a negative way, but it is by no means easy. It takes evaluative thinking and analysis to understand the texts, and dedication to completely reach this level. The professor (Michael) was a PHENOMENAL professor of the course, and he was great when explaining each confusing portion. He would not move on from a section until the class appeared confident in the text already covered. He was very funny and personable, which made lectures on very ancient texts alternatively very interesting and feel modern. He applied the texts in a way that made them still very relevant to current societal standards, and I think he killed this course as a whole. Additionally, his plan and assignments were very effective in their goals. By focusing in depth on three dialogues instead of the entire book (like some other professors), I feel confident leaving the course that I actually understand the text to a degree that I can talk about it with others, instead of gaining a surface very light understanding as I would have otherwise. Requiring a course/term paper instead of multiple smaller papers also allowed students to attack an aspect of the texts we are most interested in and push ourselves to study and research it further. This also forced us to think critically about what we are investigating as we had to come up with our own prompts and our own ideas. Overall, it was a great class that enlightened me in multiple facets of ancient philosophy, not just in the text concepts themselves, but in the arguing methods of each and how they accomplish their goals.

Selected Qualitative Feedback for PHIL2020 (Spring 2021)

I really loved this class! It made me think deeply about a variety of subjects and helped me learn how to effectively communicate a good argument. The structure of this class worked great. At first, I was unsure about the discussion posts, but by the end of the class, I enjoyed coming up with things to talk about and replying to my classmates. I haven't taken many fully online classes with a Zoom component that went well. However, Professor Starling made it feasible and entertaining.

Michael did an amazing job of facilitating this course. It was clear, from the beginning of the course, that he genuinely cared about the quality of the education that he was delivering. The material was thoroughly explained. The assignments were related to the course and served their purpose of building on the material. Now that I think about it, I believe that this is my favorite course that I have taken throughout my UGA education. Although I do enjoy the material of the class, Michael made the class immersive and elevated the attractiveness of the material.

Selected Quantitative Data (various courses)

PROMPT	PHIL3000 FALL '19 (2 SECTIONS)	PHIL2010E SUMMER '20 (1 SECTION)	PHIL2020 SPRING '21 (2 SECTIONS)
<i>Instructor explains things clearly.</i>	4.39	4.79	4.74
<i>Instructor offers help when asked.</i>	4.77	4.88	4.9
<i>Instructor assigns a reasonable amount of work.</i>	4.73	4.88	4.74
<i>Instructor effectively facilitates questions and discussions.</i>	4.56	4.83	4.68
<i>Instructor is a good teacher.</i>	4.55	4.83	4.86
<i>This course section is well organized.</i>	4.25	4.71	4.68
<i>Grading requirements and/or expectations are clear.</i>	4.46	4.79	4.77
<i>This is a good course.</i>	4.29	4.83	4.81
<i>Assignments and activities were useful for helping me learn.</i>	4.11	4.83	4.66
<i>This course challenged me to think and learn.</i>	4.53	4.75	4.75

Averages calculated using survey results solicited by Franklin College Online Course Evaluations.

Selected Teaching Evaluations from Faculty

INSTRUCTOR EVALUATION FORM

PHIL2020, Spring 2021

Instructor **Michael Starling** Observer **Yuri Balashov** Course **PHIL2020** Date **3/15/2021**

Michael's class is taught fully online. There are 34 students currently registered in it. 30 students were present at the Zoom class meeting on Mar 15, 2021 I attended.

Michael's syllabus and the eLC materials are precise and detailed. His expectations and grading policy are clearly stated. The expectations include the requirement to maintain a constant "Zoom presence" with a webcam turned on during all class meetings, which I found quite exemplary. Instead of recording the meetings Michael encourages live class participation and makes participation very easy for the students with his calm, friendly, and engaging style.

The Mar 15 class meeting was focused on validity and assumed careful reading of Ch. 6 of Weston's *Rulebook for Arguments*. Michael began by raising some basic questions, then a discussion superposed on a slide presentation ensued. I was very impressed with an almost seamless integration of the discussion (which is difficult to plan!) and the slides prepared in advance. The slides themselves have a good combination of visuals (very lively) and text. No clutter, and no fine print. And relatively slow unrushed transitions between slides are good too.

Michael devoted considerable time to a table illustrating valid and invalid arguments with different combinations of true and false premises and conclusions. I found the table extremely useful and myself wondering why I have not used a similar tool in my own versions of 2020 and 2500 during the almost 20 years of teaching them! I am making note of it.

Overall, some students were, as always, more vocal than others. But I had a sense that everyone was engaged, even if not speaking.

About halfway into the session Michael divided the class into 5 breakout rooms and assigned exercises on validity/invalidity. He gave the groups 15 min to complete them but started showing up in some breakout rooms after about 5 min, offering help where it was needed. This format is very helpful to the students. Then the general session resumed, and Michael went over the exercises, prompting the group representatives to give the answers and commenting on them. This example (of an invalid and unsound argument):

All leopards with lungs are carnivores. Therefore, all leopards are carnivores.

was particularly instructive, as it was challenging. I am sure the students greatly benefited from its extended discussion.

Summary: Michael is doing excellent work in PHIL2020 in this difficult time. He is using the class technology to full capacity. And his insistence on live presence during class sessions is a good example for everyone to follow.