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Teaching Portfolio

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Teaching Statement

My approach to teaching philosophy is primarily skills based. I will explain below what I mean by that, its value, and some of the activities I use to help students practice these skills. My discussion will be framed around the way these views were inspired by my experience as a competitive athlete and coach.

Before pursuing a career in philosophy, I was a member of the US National Team in badminton and spent nearly ten years coaching the sport. For most of my competitive career, my coach was Ram Nayyar, Head Coach for the Canadian National Team. Ram is a firm believer in the broader applicability of lessons learned through sport and impressed upon me the importance of both patience and persistence to success. But, effectively teaching these complementary virtues requires balancing the empathy and trust needed to teach patience with the firmer hand often needed to encourage persistence. We face the same challenge teaching philosophy: students need patience to learn the difficult material and challenging skills involved in philosophy, and they need persistence in the continued practice of those skills required for their mastery.

In my "A Beginner's Guide to Taking a Philosophy Course", I describe how the primary import of the distinctive skills involved in philosophy impacts its pedagogy. Most other subjects are taught with the core goal of disseminating propositional knowledge. Even in subjects like engineering, mathematics, or certain sciences that are heavily skill-based, students learn the relevant skills in the contexts where the presupposed background knowledge is not subject to challenge. But, philosophy courses are rarely like this. Although there is *some* content that must be learned, it is rarely presented in the same factive way as in other areas. What matters most in philosophy courses is that students learn how to constructively challenge the course material and refine their own views. Newer students to philosophy sometimes find this confronting. They may feel disoriented, for example, when a professor argues for a view before abruptly turning to argue against it. Aside from distributing my "Beginner's Guide", I teach with a special emphasis on the nature and limits of the tools typically used in philosophy and highlight the responsibility each student has to employ the cognitive and dialectical skills that are central to philosophy in deciding matters for themselves. But, this only goes so far. Practice is required to actually learn those how to apply those skills.

In sport, practice is essential to the acquisition of skills. However, repetitive drills can quickly become ineffective as students often lose patience and fail to persist in their practice once they believe they have grasped the lesson. As a coach, I found that activities, such as carefully constructed games, can be effective tools for incentivising practice. The social dimension of these activities also helps encourage the continued persistence needed for successful learning. I use a similar tactic in my teaching by assigning group quizzes. The benefits of this extend beyond the increased student effort that comes with graded work. More advanced students can cement their knowledge by explaining the material in their own words; less advanced students receive explanations from more epistemically immediate sources; and, all students get the chance to discuss the material with their peers in a less intimidating setting than normal classroom discussion. Another similar grade item that I assign involves written peer-reviews of paper drafts. The grade given to the reviewer is based entirely on its helpfulness. Apart from reinforcing a culture of collaboration, the reviewer is afforded a novel opportunity to engage in a philosophical dialectic, while the student recipient gets feedback that can help improve their work. On a number of occasions, students have noted subtle and tricky counterexamples (that I had not spotted myself) to the otherwise compelling arguments presented by their peers.

Finally, since patience and persistence tend to be most easily practiced in self-directed tasks, I always give students the option to propose their own term-paper topic in place of the assigned ones. When students take this option, I give individual guidance to help tighten their proposals and integrate their own ideas into their papers. I have found that this results in a significant improvement in the quality of their work. For instance, in my Summer 2016 course on rationality, two papers ended up serving as the basis for writing samples in graduate school applications. Beyond this practical benefit, this lets students experience the intellectual autonomy that is, at least for me, among the most fulfilling parts of philosophy.

Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness

In what follows, I outline my teaching experience as either the instructor of record or teaching assistant (TA) for the courses listed in table (1) conducted at the University of California, Davis (UCD) and more recently at the Korea University International Summer Campus (KU ISC) in Seoul.

Table 1. Teaching Experience

(a) Teaching Experience as Instructor

Course	*Institution*	*Enrolment*	*Term*	*Year*
► ISC-266 Introduction to Philosophy	KU ISC	26	Summer	2018
► ISC-266 Introduction to Philosophy	KU ISC	20	Summer	2018
► PHI-128 Rationality	UCD	28	Summer	2016
► PHI-005 Critical Reasoning	UCD	18	Summer	2015
► PHI-001 Introduction to Philosophy	UCD	27	Summer	2014
► PHI-012 Introduction to Symbolic Logic	UCD	70	Spring	2014
► PHI-012 Introduction to Symbolic Logic	UCD	17	Summer	2013

(b) Teaching Experience as TA

Course	*Institution*	*Enrolment*	*Term*	*Year*
► PHI-102 Theory of Knowledge	UCD	34	Fall	2016
► PHI-001 Introduction to Philosophy	UCD	32	Spring	2016
► PHI-101 Metaphysics	UCD	58	Winter	2016
► PHI-013 Minds, Brains and Computers	UCD	30	Winter	2014
► PHI-001 Introduction to Philosophy	UCD	27	Spring	2013
► PHI-101 Metaphysics	UCD	40	Winter	2013
► PHI-016 Foundations of American Democracy	UCD	50	Fall	2012
► PHI-015 Bioethics	UCD	56	Spring	2012
► PHI-101 Metaphysics	UCD	56	Winter	2012
► PHI-005 Critical Reasoning	UCD	60	Spring	2011

In the next section, I begin by providing an overview of my experience and responsibilities teaching at the KU ISC. Since the KU ISC is somewhat unique, I will first give an overview of the program before describing the experience I acquired teaching there. Subsequently, I present a cursory analysis of the aggregated student evaluation data[1] from the courses that I taught or served as a TA for at UCD. Unfortunately, no student evaluation data is available from the ISC and these data will reflect only my experience at UCD. In the later sections, I provide a more detailed look at these data including analyses for my work as an instructor and for my work as a TA. The complete set of these evaluations including student comments can be accessed in their original form on the Teaching page of my website.

Overview of Teaching Experience

Most recently, I taught two Introduction to Philosophy courses in Seoul at the ISC in the summer of 2018. The KU ISC is a prestigious academic program that offers domestic and international undergraduate students the opportunity to enrol in six-week condensed summer courses for credit that may be transferred to their home institution. All courses are taught in English at the KU ISC (primarily) by distinguished

[1]The inclusion of this data should not be taken to suggest that I believe student evaluations reliably track teaching quality. There is significant reason to doubt that they do. Nonetheless, professional norms and application requirements dictate that this material be made available.

mid/late-career academics from around the world. I was fortunate to have this opportunity when one of my mentors from graduate school, Adam Sennet, recommended me for the position. Adam, who has observed my teaching and written one of my teaching letters, proposed that they hire me to fill his shoes when he was unable to take his usual summer teaching position at the KU ISC.

The two courses I taught at the KU ISC were each comprised of roughly 25 students and met four times a week for two hours during the six-week term. My students were extremely diverse and most attended universities located in North America and Asia. While almost none had any prior knowledge of philosophy, these students continuously impressed me throughout our time together in their enthusiasm for the subject matter and desire to learn more. Having taught several condensed summer courses as a graduate student, I relied heavily on group activities to keep things on track during these lengthy classroom sessions. I was responsible for all aspects of course design and administration, including lecturing, holding office-hours, and grading student work. Aside from being a fantastic cultural experience, teaching at the ISC helped me learn more about pedagogy in a diverse educational setting and gave me the chance to learn from the other faculty. I am especially grateful to have spent time discussing issues about inclusiveness and pedagogy with Jin Y. Park (American University), who works primarily in Asian and comparative philosophy.

Turning now to my experience teaching at UCD, I taught five courses as the instructor of record and served as a TA in an additional ten courses as recorded in table 1. As the instructor of record, I was responsible for course design, lecturing, evaluating student work, holding office-hours, and grading. As a TA, I was responsible for planning and leading weekly discussion sections, evaluating student work, and holding office-hours. Student evaluations were collected in all of these courses in which students were ask to respond each of the prompts with one of five possible scores: *Excellent* (5), *Very Good* (4), *Good* (3), *Fair* (2), or *Poor* (1). The combined scores from all of these courses are aggregated and represented in figure 1.

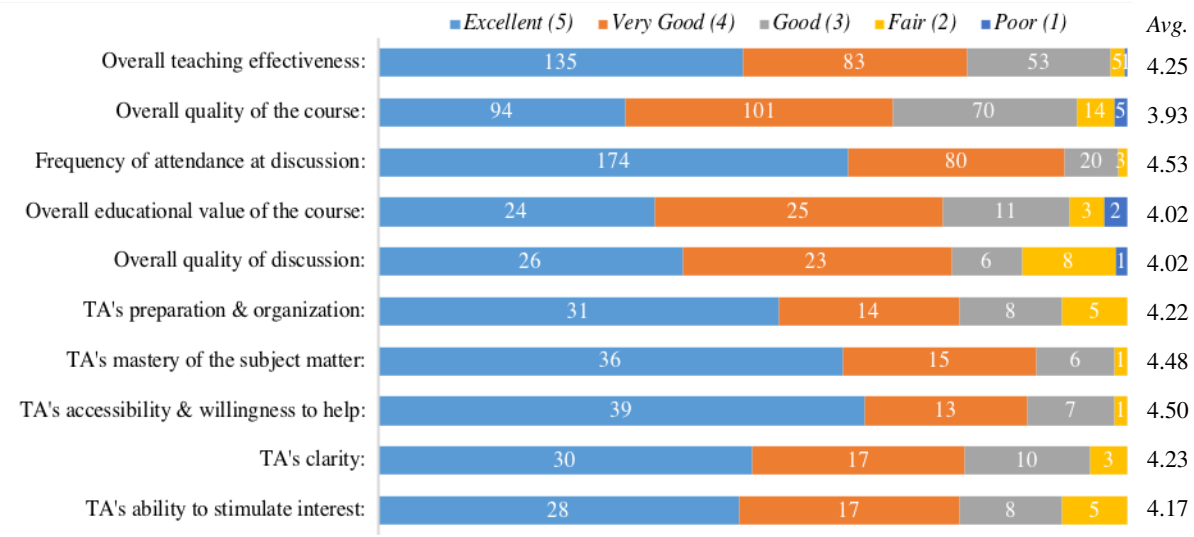
Figure 1. Aggregated Teaching Evaluations

The data represented in the figure above are further broken down further in figures (2a) and (2b) according to whether I was the course instructor or TA, respectively. There are a couple of minor irregularities in the data generated by inconsistencies in the UCD philosophy department's procedures for collecting student evaluations. First, the questions asked in the Instructor evaluations are a proper subset of those asked in the TA evaluations. As such, only those questions asked of both are included in figure (1). Second, not all of the questions in the figures were asked in all courses and, unfortunately, there is no straightforward way to explain which questions were asked in which courses. Those interested are invited to have a look at figures (3)-(7) and (8)-(17), which provide summaries of the evaluations for each course included in the overall count.

Figure 2. Combined Teaching Evaluations

(a) Instructor Evaluations

(b) TA Evaluations



Instructor Teaching Evaluations

In this section, the teaching evaluation data aggregated in figure (2a) are broken down by course. The most of these, PHI-128 Rationality, is an upper-division philosophy course, while the rest are lower-division.

Figure 3. PHI-128 Rationality (Summer, 2016)

Figure 4. PHI-005 Critical Reasoning (Summer, 2015)

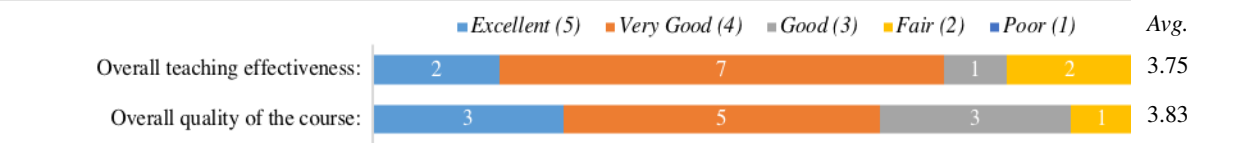


Figure 5. PHI-001 Introduction to Philosophy (Summer, 2014)

Figure 6. PHI-012 Introduction to Symbolic Logic (Spring, 2014)

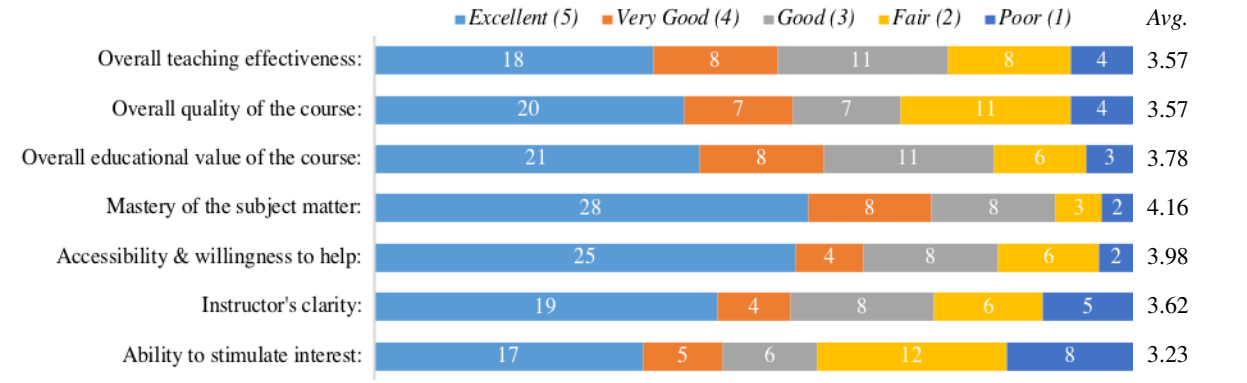


Figure 7. PHI-001 Introduction to Symbolic Logic (Summer, 2013)

TA Teaching Evaluations

This section contains summaries of the student evaluation data collected from each course included in figure (2b). In each of these courses, I worked as a TA and was responsible for preparing and leading weekly discussion sections. My other duties included grading, holding office-hours, and, in most cases, attending lectures. The breadth of these courses provided me with opportunities to observe the teaching of wide variety of faculty members and, thereby, improve my own teaching.

Figure 8. PHI-102 Theory of Knowledge (Fall, 2016)

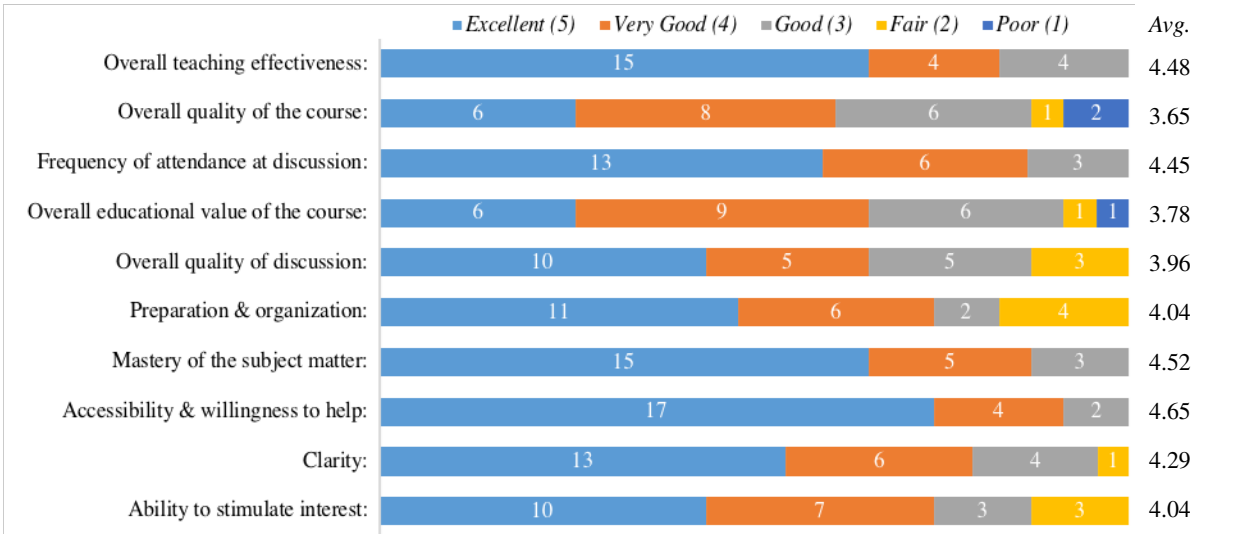


Figure 9. PHI-001 Introduction to Philosophy (Spring, 2016)

Figure 10. PHI-101 Metaphysics (Winter, 2016)

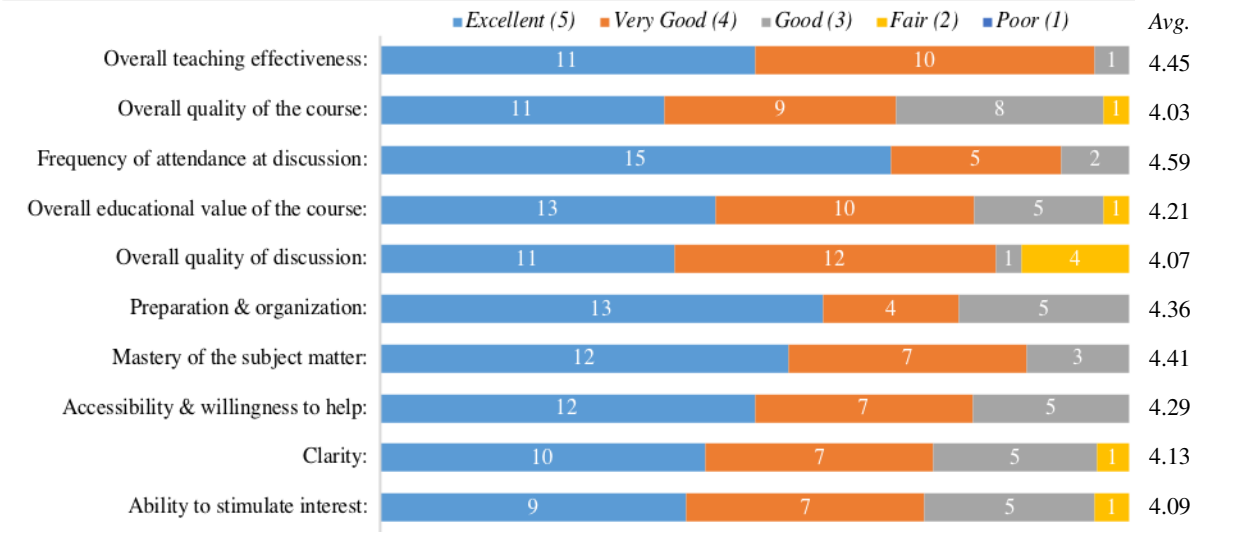


Figure 11. PHI-013 Minds, Brains and Computers (Winter, 2014)

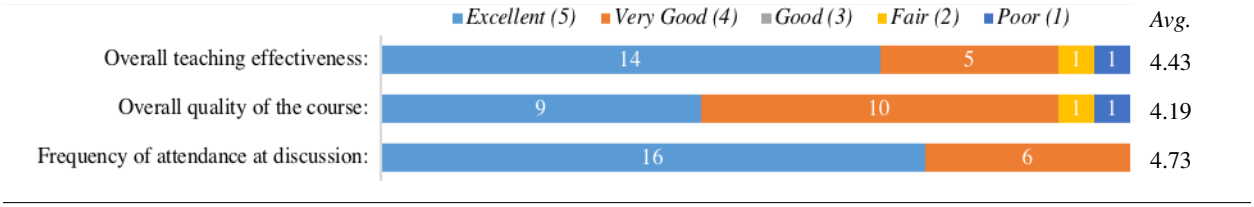


Figure 12. PHI-001 Introduction to Philosophy (Spring, 2013)

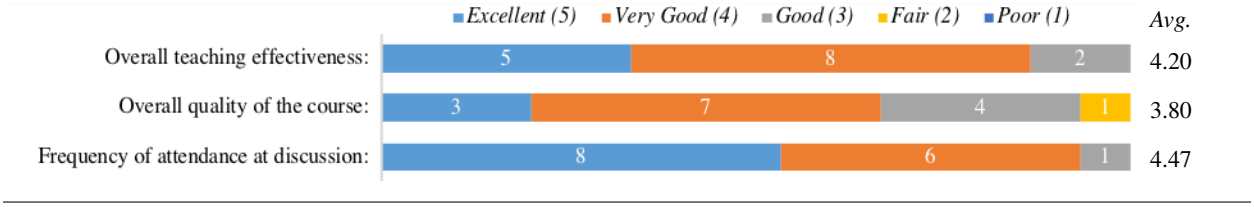


Figure 13. PHI-101 Metaphysics (Winter, 2013)

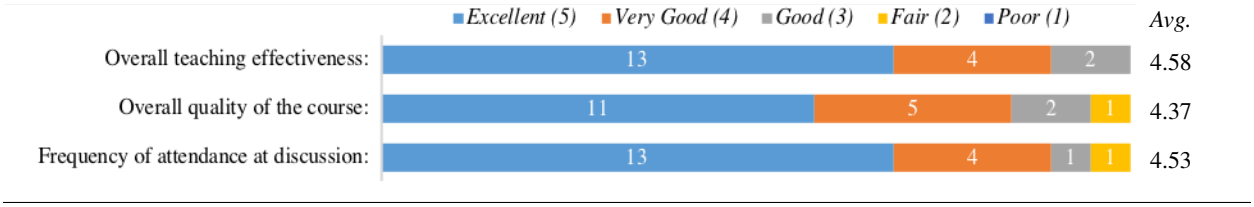


Figure 14. PHI-016 Foundations of American Democracy (Fall, 2012)

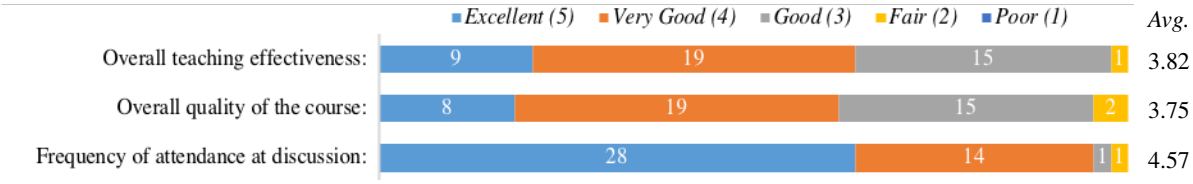


Figure 15. PHI-015 Bioethics (Spring, 2012)

Figure 16. PHI-101 Metaphysics (Winter, 2012)

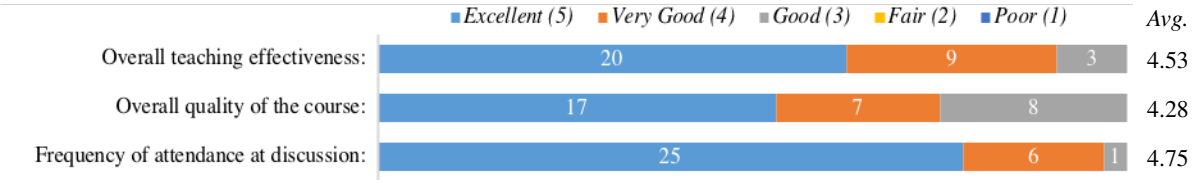
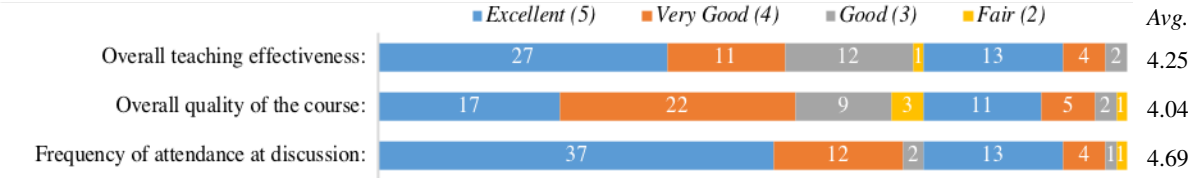



Figure 17. PHI-005 Critical Reasoning (Spring, 2011)