

Graduate Teaching Observation Form

Instructions:

For TOs: Faculty observers should fill out and send this form (or the answers in another file) to the TO, their advisor, the Teaching Officer, the GPD, the Chair, and the Graduate Administrator. Observers should also talk to the TO after the class.

For TAs: Faculty observers should fill out this form and share with the TA after observing. If there are serious concerns, they should also send the form to the other people on the list above.

Some things to consider (not exhaustive; not all applicable for TAs): student engagement; rapport between instructor and students; clarity of presentation; accuracy; appropriateness of course materials (topics, difficulty, etc); time management; classroom setup...

Graduate instructor: He Yuan

Faculty observer: Hilary Kornblith

Class: Philosophy 100. Fall 2025

Date observed: September 12, 2025

General overview of class or section (topic, class format, activities):

The class was devoted to a discussion of the mind/body problem with reference to readings by Descartes and Putnam.

He began with brief introductory remarks about software and hardware. He passed around a handout on the distinction which was clear and well presented. Students then broke up into groups of three students each with focused questions to discuss. The results were then brought back to the whole class for further discussion.

What were the main strengths of this class or section?

He did an excellent job of managing discussion. When the students were in small groups, He walked around to each group both to answer questions that arose, as well as to keep them on topic. This was done in a wonderfully unobtrusive way, yet it played a crucial role in making these groups discussions productive.

When the entire class was reassembled for a larger discussion, He wrote each of the suggestions from the groups on the board, and frequently made reference to comments from individual students thereby facilitating further interactions among them. There was extremely animated discussion, and students were clearly paying attention at all points, even those who didn't participate much.

He did not try to force the discussion in any particular direction, which allowed a wide range of issues to come up. He showed a fine ability to gently channel the discussion in constructive ways while allowing the students to take on relevant issues which concerned them. One often sees TAs—even quite good ones—determined to cover certain issues in discussion, intervening in ways that cut off good discussions so as to move things along. There is, of course, a fine balancing act which is needed here. One doesn't want to cut off a good discussion before it has run its course, but there are, inevitably, some topics which one does need to address. He does a very good job of finding the right balance here.

What suggestions do you have for improvement?

I have only one suggestion for improvement. There were quite a number of students who, although they were clearly paying attention, were content to listen to the back and forth among a small number of students rather than participate themselves. There were two students in particular who spoke far more than any others, and one of them was especially dominating, often challenging anyone who disagreed with him in a slightly aggressive manner. It made for a somewhat entertaining interchange, since there was one other student who was not put off by it, but something needs to be done to keep this student more in check, both so that the tone of discussion is kept less aggressive, and, relatedly, so that more students participate. He needs to step in a bit more, asking for other students to join in, and asking some to hold back a bit. This can be a sensitive issue, but He has the personality to do this in a constructive way and the student who dominated most is unlikely to have his feelings hurt. I have every confidence that He can do this.

I do want to emphasize that He ran an excellent class. I came away very impressed by just how engaged *all* of the students were, even the ones who didn't participate much in the larger discussions.

If you have any serious concerns, give more details here. Use this section only for serious problems, or ways in which this teaching does not meet the department's minimum expectations.

None at all. This was an excellent class.