



Fall 2016 - Individual Comment Report for Robert Howton

PHIL 0460 - INTRO PHIL MIND - 1010 - Lecture

2171 - Teaching Survey

Total Enrollment 114

Responses Received 53

Response Rate 46.49%

Subject Details

CAMPUS_CD	PIT
SCHOOL_CD	ARTSC
DEPARTMENT_CD	PHIL
CLASS_NBR	27664
COURSE_NUMBER	460
SECTION_NUMBER	1010

Report Comments

Responses to open-ended questions

Creation Date Thu, Dec 29, 2016

What were the instructor's major strengths?

Comments
He was very willing to answer questions and explain things in depth.
Provoking thought on subjects I have never taken the time to discuss.
Communicated complicated topics very well, gave very good examples of material
His notes were outstanding- very rarely, if ever, any confusion in the notes. He was also energetic and a good speaker to 9am kids.
Robby was genuinely interested in the material he was teaching. I appreciated how passionate he was towards the material.
Good about clarifying concepts in the reading and giving tangible examples to relate the topics to
Made sure that everyone understand what he had said during lecture before moving onto a different subject.
Organized, seemed enthusiastic about philosophy!
Communication and energy
passionate, easily conveyed ideas and topics
He explained everything as clearly as he could which is a major strength in a course like this. He used examples that everyone could relate to and tried to clarify anyone's questions throughout lecture. He also provided excellent notes online which helped with studying.
He was never hard to approach and always polite and patient when explaining concepts.
Very precise and direct in the language used, which is helpful for communicating ideas and thought processes
He explained concepts in examples that were easy to understand, which helped simplify the concepts that he was explaining.
Knew his topics well
The lectures were very organized and I loved that the lecture notes were always posted on CourseWeb in advance so that I could focus more on what Dr. Howton was saying while adding extra notes I felt I needed. He seems very passionate about what he does and provides really good examples to clarify sometimes confusing topics.
Enthusiastic and knowledgeable
very good speaker
Organized, well prepared, knowledgeable. Sharing the notes with the students was so helpful and generous, definitely a major strength.
explains everything very carefully with relatable examples
Very good lecturer
speaking
Use of examples to explain abstract concepts
down-to-earth kept a fun environment organized
Good at relaying concepts and was very organized
He commanded his lectures extremely well. He spoke strongly and clearly. He never seemed to rush through his notes which covered the material so well that it almost entirely eliminated the need for references beyond the readings. And the readings themselves charted an incredibly ordered and logical course through out the entire semester such that, now at the end, everything we've learned has led seamlessly from one place to the next, culminating in the most interesting and complex material.
He presented theories and concepts in an understandable and straightforward way. He also went back and did a little bit of review at the beginning of class relatively often, which was helpful in maintaining the flow of the course and reminding us how we had gotten to the point we were at.
Professor Howton was nice, and considerably comical and light hearted in class, which was always appreciated

Comments

His lectures were very well organized and got you thinking.

He is good at taking complex material and making it easier for introductory philosophy students to understand.

Very relatable person and had a passion for both his work and the success of his students

Good lectures

The instructor was clear on information and clarification of topics. They seemed knowledgeable of the subject and gave me a thorough understanding.

Dr Howton was good at having plenty of examples to clarify what he was teaching, as well as being very open to questions that the students had.

Lectures were very organized and presented material in a logical manner.

He is very positive and maintained a positive attitude at every lecture.

Organization and clarity

Seemed passionate about subject material, and had high energy which made the course more interesting.

He was straight to the point and did not trick us when it came to the test material

The course had a lot of abstract, complicated concepts and he did a good job explaining them in terms that a student could understand.

Robbie is friendly and shows great passion for the subject. He is not alienating, and has only increased my passion for philosophy. A remarkable professor. Also, amazingly lively for a 9 AM class.

He was always very organized and answered questions in class

Professor Howton, you clearly were knowledgeable about the topics you teach. You offered to organize notes for your lectures, and enthusiastic during lecture. You offered the extra hand of helping to your students, and prepared them to be better thinkers.

He was very approachable and accessible. He is a very good professor.

He presented material fairly clearly, especially through examples and situations that students could relate to.

Really good speaker, provides detailed notes.

What were the instructor's major weaknesses?

Comments
Sometimes the material wasn't effectively explained in ways one could understand or in ways that were related to real life.
Bland teaching style (not very interactive)
Reads off of lecture notes, little incentive to go to class
I don't know if he graded any of my stuff... maybe the tests? I believe my TA graded my papers.
Personally, his way of lecturing made it hard to focus in class. Robby read the notes word for word which sometimes went too fast in class. These lecture notes were extremely beneficial outside of class.
Tended to read word for word off the slides but that really is a minor weakness
N/a
did not have much contact with students
Was not great at explaining concepts or ideas
Could be more interesting. Class seemed a boring, because he read directly from notes posted on course web.
read his notes verbatim
Can be difficult to stay focused on
Spend more time on the more difficult aspects and theories, decrease reading size
I don't know.
I think it would be helpful if, in lecture, it were stated more explicitly which theories were which and belonged to whom. For example, stating that Descartes supported Dualism, which states that mind and body are different kinds of substances. This example was identified and explained, but I think it would've been helpful to go through all the theories we discussed at the end and identify and match all the names and theories and so on.
The class was extremely confusing and difficult to understand.
none
His notes that he posts on CourseWeb are the exact same as his dialogue in class, so it makes it tempting to skip class.
None
At times the information being presented felt disorganized, as if we were jumping back and forth from one idea to the other rather than sticking to one single line of thought... But I think this is just the nature of a philosophy class, not a fault of the instructor.
None that I can think of
he read straight off the notes
His notes sometimes included terminology that a philosopher would understand but not a student.
I do not know if there were any major weaknesses
Sometimes the examples were a bit repetitive, (C fibers firing, spiciness of chili pepper etc)
I do think that the exams were challenge, and relatively unfair with the amount of material that they covered. I think it would've been helpful to prepare an actual review session, rather the focusing solely on the questions students have.
He read off of his powerpoint a lot of the time, so didn't seem to engage the students as well as he probably could've.
None

What aspects of this course were most beneficial to you?

Comments
Examples
Gained new knowledge
Information about the mind and subjectivity

Comments
The lecture notes to review helped me very much when I took an in depth look at them.
They caused me to expand my range of thinking and consider different possibilities and sides for each topic covered
Extensive notes
Lecture, and lecture notes.
the term papers assigned made you know the information thoroughly which helped for tests.
Having a recitation. Recitations helped me a lot with understanding the material and gave me a place to ask questions and clarify some of the concepts.
The lecture was the main way I got knowledge.
Lectures and the provided guiding notes
I enjoyed that all of the lecture notes were online so we could follow along and reference them outside of class.
None
Applied to some of my other classes (Poli sci major)
I thought the review sessions in class before exams were really helpful. I thought the writing assignments were very helpful and they clarified topics I was confused about beforehand.
the lectures
I have no strong opinions on this course
Lecture notes
lecture notes online
The notes were very clear and easy to follow along with in lecture
The lecture notes are impeccable. They in now way eliminate the challenge of truly understanding the material, but they're a remarkable guide along the way.
In a larger sense, I will benefit from a fundamental change in my perspective that has resulted from this course. I am more aware of the nature of consciousness, which is such a wild thought, but its true. I feel somehow more awake in my knowing. That's some weird verbiage, but I don't know how else to put it.
The course stimulated my thinking a lot on what exactly the mind is, even if we didn't exactly arrive at a definitive answer. As a psychology major, the mind and brain and how they operate are very interesting to me and this course got me thinking and helped me to develop my own personal beliefs on how people's minds work.
N/A
The recitations were extremely helpful.
I liked the lecture style with the supplement of a small recitation. His lecture notes were also extremely helpful.
The accessibility to lecture notes
Lectures
I think I have a decent understanding of the philosophy of mind. The course also made me further interested in the subject, and I may want to pursue a minor in it.
I learned new ideas about the mind and consciousness that I had not considered before.
Reading documents I could apply to life. Lecture notes.
Detailed notes supplied on course web allowed for me to listen more in lecture and revisit the notes after class which was very helpful.
recitation because in that class i can fully understand by talking with my peers about the course material
The professors notes and recitation class.
Learning more about philosophy
The lecture notes were super helpful to read over after lecture to fully digest what was said. Sometimes it was a bit confusing at 9am but having the notes online was amazing
Definitely the notes and the readings
Online access to notes was incredibly helpful.

Comments

All of them!

What suggestions do you have to improve the course?

Comments

More interactive

More incentive to come to lecture

The readings began to be very tedious.

I don't really have any, found the course to be one of my favorite courses so far!

Get better TA's

I would have liked to see more bulleted information on the slides in class that highlighted important information instead of long paragraphs from the reading along with a few definitions. It would have made taking notes and studying a lot easier. Also, while I liked the idea of reading an article before lecture and then talking about it, I feel like the readings were excessively long. I found it hard to find the time to read a 25+ page paper and thoroughly analyze it in one night. I also would have appreciated a better explanation of the layout of the tests and what to expect.

I honestly think its a great balance of self learning and guided learning if you participate

Include more engaging examples and applications

Have a recitation in which ideas are clarified rather than having a recitation that is open discussion and can be confusing.

Don't just read lecture notes word for word in lecture

For an introductory philosophy course, some of the material was difficult for someone who has never taken a philosophy course before. Also, some of the reading was very long and dense (again, some of it was difficult to understand for someone who has never taken philosophy). I did not think the reading contributed much to my learning in the course.

There was a lot of reading, which would be fine if we used all the information. However, many of the key takeaways from each paper could be stated in a few bullet points.

Make lecture mandatory so more people show up

the readings were often very lengthy and confusing...maybe give shorter sections of reading or discuss them more in class.

I have no strong opinions on this course

Less/ shorter readings

more clarification on what is expected on essays

More writing. Its thru the articulation of the philosophical principles that mastery is demonstrated. And even for those of us who didn't select the writing option, more time and attention could be given to writing about these ideas. But with that said, the course load is so balanced, that any change might effect the pacing.

Like I said in the weaknesses question, I think it'd be helpful to go through the theories and put a name and key points to each of them.

Making better use of recitations to understand the course.

none

The class is already very good, but maybe Professor Howton can provide us with only a skeletal outline online and then provide us with examples and supplementary information during lecture.

Elaborate more on the posted lecture notes in class

None

Make the curriculum a little more streamlined and organized.

Look for more examples to explain the concepts

None

Perhaps more graded material such as quizzes or additional tests.

Comments

more tests because there are a lot of material to cover

None.

Don't put so many of the lecture notes online until maybe a week before the test. It is a 9 AM class, and many of my fellow students feel they can skip and then just read the lecture notes online. Their loss. I find the lectures extremely rewarding.

Less intensive reads because 50-70 pages a week of challenging text is tough

A lecture where he doesn't read off of the slides, it would be nice to have some separate examples from class, or something that makes it worth it to go to class.

I felt that many of the readings were far too long and dense to read, especially for students who are not studying or majoring in philosophy. They didn't seem to help me on exams because everything we needed to know for the exams were from the lecture notes. If we had shorter readings, or talked about them more in lecture, I would've valued them much more.

I also wish we had done a more formal review for the exams, rather than just spent class time asking questions. A review/study guide that we could spend time looking at on our own first, and then go over in class would have really helped.