

Teaching Portfolio

Simone Gubler

Table of Contents:

1. Statement of Teaching Philosophy
2. Student Evaluations
 - a. Scores: Instructor of Record
 - b. Comments: Instructor of Record
 - c. Scores: Teaching Assistant
 - d. Comments: Teaching Assistant
3. Three Course Ideas
 - a. Justice, Resistance, and Retribution
 - b. Four Moral Philosophers: Anscombe, Foot, Murdoch, and Midgely
 - c. Philosophy of the Visual Arts

1. Teaching Statement

I want all of my students to approach ideas with excitement, and to learn to think and write with clarity and rigor. To that end, I work to make my classroom an engaging and active space, where all students feel competent and included. As I have gained experience as a teacher, I have learned to pay careful attention to who my students are, and to what motivates them.

In my first assignment as a solo instructor at the University of Texas, I opened by asking everyone to introduce themselves and tell me about why they were taking the class. I was soon informed that several of those enrolled in the class were not taking it because they had any particular interest in the subject-matter – political philosophy – but because the course had an “ethics and leadership flag,” and would satisfy a degree requirement. I needed to find a way to connect with these students, who might never take another philosophy course, and who seemed inclined to regard the coursework as a hurdle to be cleared. A lecture on the intrinsic value of philosophy was not going to win them over – I needed to show them what philosophy could do for them and their worldly projects.

So, I adapted. I started to open my lectures with statements from major political figures that evoked the influence of political philosophies – like Robespierre’s speech on the fate of the King, which contains rich references to social contract theory. I ended each class with a discussion question relating the reading to the present context: “pick one Athenian democratic practice or institution that present-day American democracy lacks, and make an argument for implementing it today.” I also moved the class beyond the walls of the classroom, by taking my students on a field trip to the LBJ Presidential Library, where we toured archives on the civil rights movement. Having just read Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from A Birmingham Jail,” my students appreciated the opportunity to listen to recordings of private phone conversations between President Johnson and King, and to experience another dimension of King’s thought and activism.

The following semester, I taught a course on Human Nature, and continued to search for new ways to highlight the practical significances of the theoretical debates we encountered. For example, I had my students engage in a mock trial. Each student was assigned to a legal team and asked to argue the philosophical merits of a real amicus brief written by a group of philosophers in support of a habeas corpus claim for two chimpanzees (the issue at hand – whether the chimpanzees enjoyed “personhood”).

Being an effective educator also requires sensitivity to socially conditioned obstacles to learning. When I started working as a philosophy instructor in the adult degree program at Huston-Tillotson University, in Austin, TX, I was struck by how often my students would express anxieties about their philosophical ability. This was troubling – even if these anxieties didn’t succeed in frustrating learning, they clearly had the potential to make the experience of learning miserable.

Again, I adapted, and worked to tailor my teaching practices to contest this problem. I adopted strategies that would encourage students to think about philosophical learning in

developmental terms, and that would cultivate a sense of community and belonging. Drawing on Claudia Mueller and Carol Dweck's work on learning mindsets, I substituted traditional high-stakes assessments, like heavily-weighted exams, for a varied program of assessment designed to promote and reward the progressive development of skills and insight. At the beginning of the semester, I set a number of small, confidence-building writing assignments. These were followed by a larger project: a staged essay writing assignment, with multiple opportunities for feedback and revision.

I also asked each student to meet with me early in the semester for a one-on-one conversation about their aspirations for the class. Such meetings provide an opportunity to learn about my students' interests within, and beyond, the classroom. This can help to foster a sense of community in the classroom. For example, when I taught political philosophy, I learned that many of my students had active interests in music. I encouraged them to send me examples of politically engaged music. As I was setting up for each lecture, I would play a submitted song and acknowledge the recommender.

I aspire to set high expectations of critical conversancy with the course content, and to provide each student with the opportunities and resources they need to meet them. All students have the potential to engage meaningfully with philosophical concepts and debates, and to produce clear, interesting, and careful work. It is my job to secure their attention, to clear away impediments to learning, and to firmly point them in the direction of the realization of that potential.

2(a) Scores: Instructor

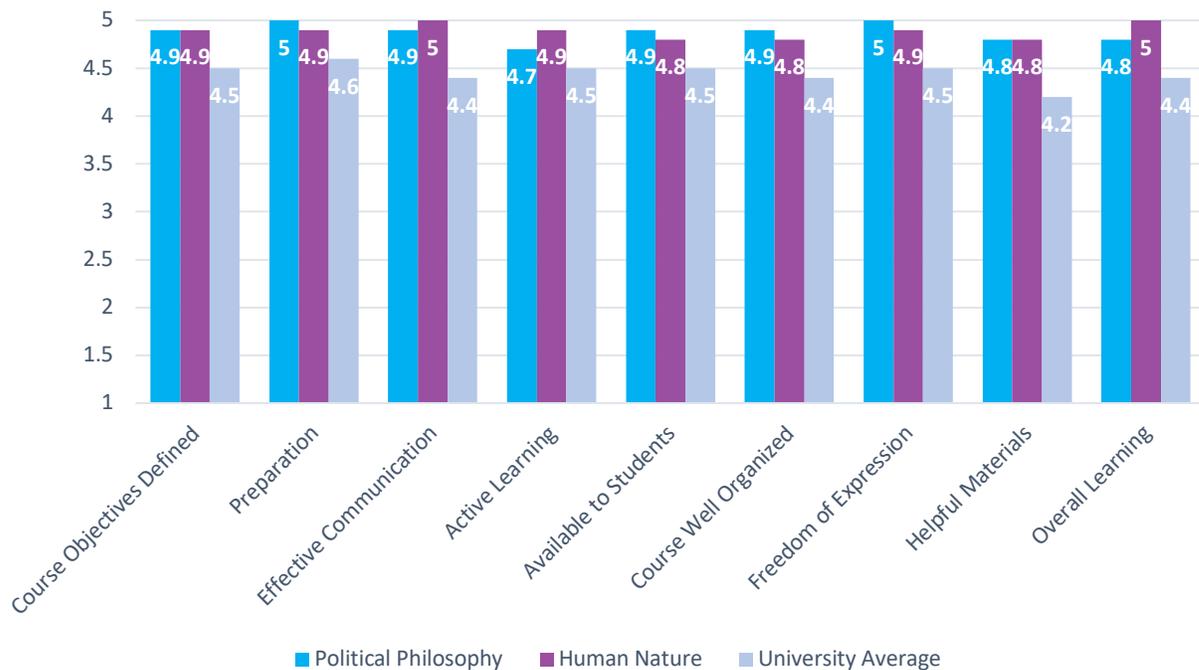
The University of Texas solicits anonymous student feedback at the end of each course. Surveys include multiple choice questions and a space for written comments. In what follows, I summarize my results and provide sample comments from each semester.

The table to the right contains average scores for UT courses in which I was instructor-of-record.* Evaluations are on a 5-point scale, with a score of 1 signifying “strongly disagree” and 5 signifying “strongly agree.”

The comparative chart below includes university-wide average instructor scores.

Questions	Human Nature	Political Philosophy
1. The instructor clearly defined and explained the course objectives and expectations.	4.9	4.9
2. The instructor was prepared for each instructional activity.	5.0	4.9
3. The instructor communicated information effectively.	4.9	5.0
4. The instructor encouraged me to take an active role in my own learning.	4.7	4.9
5. The instructor was available to students.	4.9	4.8
6. The course was well organized.	4.9	4.8
7. The instructor made me feel free to ask questions, disagree, and express ideas.	5.0	4.9
8. The course materials were helpful to me.	4.8	4.8
9. Overall, I learned a great deal in this course	4.8	5.0

Instructor Evaluation: Comparative Table



* These scores reflect my evaluations at UT Austin. Teaching evaluations were not given for courses in the Adult Degree Program at Huston-Tillotson, or for instructors in the Corrupt the Youth outreach program.

2(b). Sample Comments: Instructor

Human Nature – Spring 2018

1. All the material and the instruction tied together amazingly well. Simone was extremely personable, animated, and knew the course material extremely well. She was terrific at engaging all the students!
2. I had a fantastic time in this class. I found myself using things that I learned in everyday conversations with friends and family. Simone made the dense readings seem simple without preventing us from drawing our own conclusions. Even the assignments were a pleasure to complete. Simone made learning rewarding for its own sake. One of my favorite professors I have had.
3. This professor is probably the most intellectual professor I have ever had. It's exemplified through her teaching style and her amazing vocabulary just how smart she is. I think I gained brain cells in this class, if that's a thing.
4. Simone was a great instructor and was clearly knowledgeable in the course material. She made the class fun and made it a safe space to have real discussions.
5. I really enjoyed taking the course with Simone. She is a brilliant professor and was always available to discuss philosophy topics after and outside of class. She was always very kind and supportive. Thank you for a great semester of Human Nature.

Introduction to Political Philosophy – Fall 2017

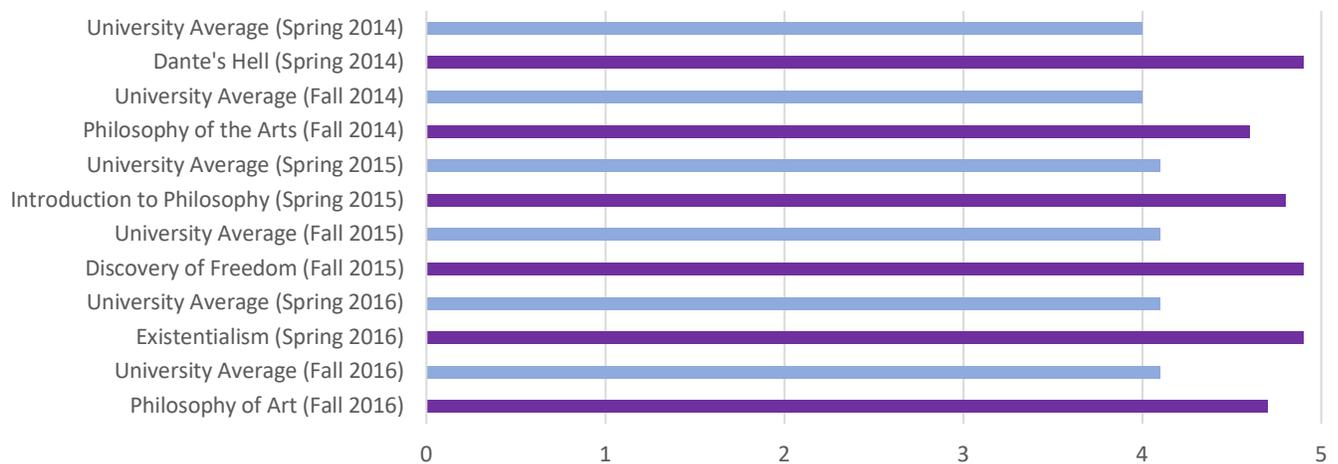
1. This was my first philosophy course, and I'm beyond happy I took it with Prof. Gubler. She was passionate about the material and made it enjoyable to discuss openly. Also, this is the only university class I've taken where the students could openly speak about politics in the climate America is in right now. Bravo, job well done prof!
2. Great and engaging teacher. I feel as though my knowledge of political philosophy has grown by ten-fold. Always facilitated relevant discussions that expanded my understanding of topics. Would highly recommend this teacher to anyone with any real interest in political philosophy.
3. Amazing lecturer! They took the time to engage with the class and listen to the opinion of others. Learned a great deal in this course. Thank you for a great semester!
4. The professor made this course worthwhile and accessible to all, regardless of experience in philosophy. The assignments and quizzes made keeping up easy, and I feel like the freedom given for the papers was an amazing experience to allow one to pursue his/her interest. I loved the chosen required readings and corresponding historical background given in class.
5. Enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and encouraged everyone to participate. Any university would be lucky to have her.

2(c). Scores: Teaching Assistant

I taught several discussion sections for each course listed, the following scores are averages of the results of each section. Evaluations are on a 5-point scale, with 1 signifying “strongly disagree” and 5 signifying “strongly agree.”

Questions	Philosophy of the Arts Fall 2016	Existentialism Spring 2016	Discovery of Freedom Fall 2015	Introduction to Philosophy Spring 2015	Philosophy of the Arts Fall 2014	Dante’s Hell Spring 2014
TA knowledgeable about subject-matter	5.0	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.8	4.7
TA interested in subject-matter	4.9	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.8	4.8
TA explained material clearly	4.9	4.7	4.8	4.9	4.6	4.5
TA kind and respectful	4.9	4.8	5.0	4.8	4.7	4.9
TA patient with questions	4.9	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.7	4.8
TA receptive to questions	4.9	4.8	4.9	4.9	4.7	4.8
TA gave helpful feedback on assignments	4.7	4.7	4.8	4.8	4.5	4.8
Teaching Assistant Rating	4.7	4.9	4.9	4.8	4.6	4.9

Comparison of TA Rating with University Averages



2(d). Sample Comments: Teaching Assistant

Philosophy of the Arts – Fall 2016

1. Really enjoyed this section! Simone Gubler is a wonderful TA, expresses ideas clearly, broke down concepts and explained them really well, was enthusiastic. Handouts were so helpful! Helped focus on important details to better understand articles. Thanks so much!
2. Ms. Gubler made learning about the Philosophy of Art enjoyable. I came to class eager to hear whatever interesting new information or insight she had to offer us. Her positive attitude helped cultivate an inviting atmosphere for ideas. Everyone felt comfortable in her classroom and she made sure we all learned and understood the material. She gave us everything we needed to be successful in the class, and for me, personally, some of the ideas on art she included will remain past the duration of this course.
3. Simone was extremely helpful in increasing my understanding of course material. She was always prepared with very helpful handouts she had made herself. Very knowledgeable on every topic and always willing to answer questions in their entirety. She has made me appreciate both philosophy and art much more than I did before this course.
4. I really liked having Simone as my T.A. She was great, much better than my other T.A.'s. I feel that she could teach this course no problem. She's very helpful & knowledgeable & creates a warm & inviting atmosphere. 10/10 would recommend :-)

Existentialism – Spring 2016

1. Simone was fantastic. I honestly can't imagine a better teaching assistant. She has an incredible knack for finding a way to articulate tricky philosophical concepts in such a way that makes them really clear and approachable. I loved our weekly discussion sections.
2. These discussion sections were not only very helpful for the general class, but were often very enjoyable simply due to Gubler's profound understanding of the subject matter and her ability to facilitate original and varied discussions.
3. Simone was the BEST TA I've had in the Philosophy Department and overall at UT. Makes difficult material understandable, very kind, patient, and just generally awesome.
4. Loved her! She always made TA sessions interactive & interesting. She was super helpful whenever I had questions about anything and you can tell she cared about her students. She was always at review sessions even when other TA's weren't. Great TA!

Discovery of Freedom – Fall 2015

1. Simone is great. She is very knowledgeable, patient, and ensures that everyone is involved in discussion, no matter their skill level. She consistently went above and beyond her duties as a TA. For example, when we wrote philosophy papers, she went and found a contest that we could submit our essays to. She did not have to go out of her way to do this, but

she genuinely cares about our learning. She is very respectful and insightful. All in all, Simone is fantastic.

2. Simone works very hard to ensure that we are prepared for the course assignments, and helps us gain a deeper understanding of the material. She is extremely competent at prompting and answering questions, and makes students feel welcome to challenge presumptions or arguments. She provides helpful, detailed, and structural feedback on papers in order to not only ensure various mistakes are corrected, but our writing improves. There are very few pieces of advice I could provide. Perhaps being more strict on making sure students improve their Blog posts. Honestly it's hard to think of anything else.
3. Simone was always willing to help with any questions about the course, the assignments, the grading. She was available for office hours at very convenient times and was flexible with her scheduling. She gave excellent advice when revising papers.
4. She was extremely helpful and kind. Out of all my TA's she is by far my favorite. She helped the class understand the material and it was clear that she was extremely knowledgeable in the subject and in other areas.

Introduction to Philosophy – Spring 2015

1. I loved this class and my TA. It is because of my TA and the curiosity this class gave me that I am considering changing my major to philosophy. She was an amazing TA and always available outside of her office hours (I could never go to them because I had a class at that time). She truly did care about the subject and her students.
2. I couldn't have asked for a better TA, and this course has been one of the most enjoyable learning experiences I've ever had the opportunity to have.
3. Simone was a great TA, she was always energetic and enthusiastic, the game-quiz prep was fun and helped prep for the quizzes. But I also enjoyed just discussing the topics as it helped clarify things.
4. Keep smiling and being positive!! Keep asking thought-provoking questions!

Philosophy of the Arts – Fall 2014

1. Very knowledgeable about subject matter. Showed genuine passion and enthusiasm for philosophy, and strongly encouraged individual thought and inquiry. An excellent TA.
2. Simone was excellent. She was very respectful and helpful. She was very engaged in helping us facilitate discussion and helping us learn to study philosophy.
3. I would have failed this course without the TA discussion section. Simone was wonderful and I'm so glad she was here.

4. Commentary given back to questions was amazingly insightful!

Dante's Hell and its Afterlife – Spring 2014

1. Simone was very knowledgeable on all the course work and was very willing to work with students to help in whatever they needed. Definitely one of the best TAs I've had during my time at the University of Texas.
2. I think Simone was a thoughtful T.A. and enjoyed her critical approach to the text, quizzes, and writing. I felt she was very interested in hearing our viewpoints and what we brought to the text.
3. This class was a lot of fun. I've always loved this story and now I feel like I have a pretty good understanding of it. The discussion sessions were small and fairly personal which I believe is the best way for a class to be structured.
4. I felt she did a great job! I think she will make a wonderful professor.

3. Three Course Ideas

Thus far, I have developed and implemented syllabi for courses on ethics, political philosophy, and human nature. In what follows, I give brief descriptions of three new courses that I would love to have the opportunity to teach. The first course, "Justice, Resistance, and Retribution," is suited to undergraduate philosophy majors and students contemplating legal studies. The second course, "Four Moral Philosophers," is suited to upper-level undergraduates, or a graduate seminar. The third course, "Philosophy of the Visual Arts," could serve as an entry-level philosophy course.

a. Justice, Resistance, and Retribution

"I cannot recognize the verdict of guilty... I would stress that I am guilty of having been obedient, having subordinated myself to my official duties and the obligations of war service and my oath of allegiance and my oath of office, and in addition, once the war started, there was also martial law. Obedience is commended as a virtue. May I therefore ask that consideration be given to the fact that I obeyed, and not whom I obeyed."

So spoke Adolph Eichmann, one of the architects of the Holocaust, during his trial in Jerusalem. In this course, we will study the relationship between law and morality, focusing in particular upon three questions raised by Eichmann's plea: (1) What makes a law authoritative? (2) What should we do when confronted by immoral laws? And, (3) how should we respond to those who obey, and those who resist, immoral laws?

By the end of this course, students will have:

- Become conversant with some of the major debates in the philosophy of law
- Developed familiarity with classic and contemporary texts in the history of legal philosophy
- Practiced applying abstract theories to real problems of social and individual conduct
- Laid the theoretical groundwork for a reflective career as an outlaw or a model citizen

Possible Readings:

J.S. Mill, *On Liberty*, Aquinas, *Theory of Justice*, Patrick Devlin, *The Enforcement of Morals*, H.L.A. Hart, *The Concept of Law*; Ronald Dworkin, *Law's Empire*; Joseph Raz, *Law, Authority and Morality*; M.B.E. Smith, *Is There a Prima Facie Obligation to Obey the Law?*; Henry David Thoreau, *Civil Disobedience*; Martin Luther-King Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*; Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*; Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*; Robert Jackson, *Opening Statement at Nuremburg*; Win-Chiat Lee, *International Crimes and Universal Jurisdiction*; Deidre Golash, *The Justification of Punishment in the International Context*; Claire Finkelstein, *Punishment as Contract*; Heather Strang and Lawrence Sherman, *Repairing the Harm: Victims and Restorative Justice*; John Braithwaite, *Shame and Criminal Justice*; Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*; Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete*.

b. Four Moral Philosophers: Anscombe, Foot, Murdoch, and Midgely

During World War II, four extraordinary moral philosophers trained together at Oxford, they were: G.E.M. Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Iris Murdoch, and Mary Midgely. In this course, we will read their work, gain a grounding in it, and try to understand how each thinker, in Mary Midgely's words, "came to think out alternatives to the brash, unreal style of philosophizing – based essentially on logical positivism – that was current at the time."

By the end of this course students will have:

- Become acquainted with the work of four major postwar moral philosophers
- Worked with their classmates to identify points of commonality and divergence between these distinctive thinkers
- Developed familiarity with an important chapter in the history of analytic moral philosophy

c. Philosophy of the Visual Arts

This course is intended to serve as an introduction to what I hope will be a lifelong passion and practice: thinking philosophically about art. There is a great deal of philosophy that concerns art, and an even greater deal of art available for philosophical contemplation. In this course, we will focus on the visual arts, pursuing a historical trajectory from the revolutions in painting that shook the Paris Salons of the 18th and 19th Centuries, to the birth of photography and the emergence of cinema. Along the way, we will confront questions in the company of some of the great philosophers and artists who anticipated, bore witness to, and theorized these developments.

Our questions will range from the abstract to the practical: What relation does art bear to truth? What does it mean to say an artwork is realistic? What does it mean to say that an artwork is modern? What is a painting? What is a photograph? What is a film? How should we understand and evaluate radical art? What relationship can or should art bear to political expression?

By the end of this course students will have:

- Become familiar with some of the major issues in the philosophy of art
- Engaged in debates concerning realism and modernism in the visual arts
- Evaluated specific artworks in light of theories introduced in this class
- Enjoyed exposure to a lot of visual art!

Possible Readings:

(1) Introduction

- Art, beauty and truth: Plato, *Republic* 3 and 10; Pliny the Elder, *Zeuxis and Parrhasius*; Oscar Wilde, *The Decay of Lying*.
- Judging art: David Hume, *Of the Standard of Taste*; Immanuel Kant, extract from *The Critique of Judgment*.
- Art and the spirit of its time: extracts from Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Arts* and Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Idea*.

(2) The Birth of Modern Painting: Denis Diderot, *Notes on the Salon of 1765*; Michael Fried, *Courbet's Realism*; TJ Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*; Vincent Van Gogh, *Letter on the Potato Eaters*; Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life*.

(3) Photography: Walter Benjamin, *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*; André Bazin, *The Ontology of the Photographic Image*; Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*; Susan Sontag, *On Photography*.

(4) Film: André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*; Sergei Eisenstein, *Through Theatre to Cinema*; Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed*; Cynthia Freeland, *Film Theory*; Alexander Nehamas, *Only a Promise of Happiness*; bell hooks, *The Oppositional Gaze*.