

# Teaching Dossier

Jason G. Cather

Spring 2015



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**Part I**  
**Teaching Documents**



# Philosophy of Teaching Statement

The aim of teaching the philosophy of religion is to train an individual in a particular manner of reading, listening, thinking, and responding to others. As My first professor in graduate school once characterized it, philosophical thinking is “a way of being around other people.” Its value lies in having more people interested in thinking more clearly, not in contributing to a heap of facts to be remembered. This value is seen when a student listens to another student, or reads a text charitably and strives to express herself as clearly as possible, defending her position with evidence and sound reasoning. There are topics, books, thinkers, and arguments which are beneficial for a student of philosophy to understand. These are often called “the material.” While “the material” is certainly worth studying, it is so because it provides occasions to read carefully, ask questions, listen and respond to one another charitably yet critically. In the texts, students find models for precision and clarity, and arguments in which their participation affords opportunity to hone these skills.

I have served as a teaching assistant for a course required of every master’s student at the Divinity School, and taught the introductory philosophy course required of all undergraduate students at Saint Xavier University. Most of the students at both institutions will not concentrate their studies in philosophy, and only a few will take philosophy courses beyond the general requirement. I often ask myself about the duty I have to those students whose philosophical education begins and ends with me. It cannot simply be to make sure that they “know the material.” Kant’s antinomies of pure reason might be considered “important” by philosophers, but this import does not carry over to a college freshman majoring in French literature, nor to a graduate student working on medieval hagiography.

My students read difficult material that challenges their abilities to understand and reiterate an argument in their own words with charity and precision. I then have them share their understanding of the argument verbally with the class. This part causes anxiety for some of the students. I struggle with this at times because I don’t understand what that anxiety is like, but a number of my colleagues who do experience it were willing to share strategies with me. In each class, I circulate colored index cards for the students to use to respond in class. I try to make the first few questions of each meeting very-low-pressure (I make it very clear that I never use this for grading purposes). This encourages participation without anxiety. As I shift to higher-order questions, I have made an effort to follow two recommendations. First, I will take a poll of their responses before breaking them into small discussion groups. I can use the clear visual queue to divide them based either on consensus or on disagreement as the question and student personalities warrant. I will follow up to see whether the discussion led to



consensus, or if the disagreement stands. The latter case is often just as productive as the former, as it exposes them to counterarguments, which demand more of them. When I ask questions that have the potential to produce more anxiety, I will preemptively ask them to reflect before responding. This looks something like, “In a minute, I’m going to ask you to respond with your cards, but for now think about how you would answer the following...” I have noticed that without the pressure of immediacy, student answers are more diverse – which I can easily check by looking at the different colors around the room. This tells me that they are thinking on their own rather than hiding in the crowd of the classroom.

Finally, I challenge my students to write about what they read and think. Writing conventions vary from genre to genre. Discursive writing is no different. Philosophy has the virtue that conventions are largely the same for writing as for speaking. Our writing is a way of being around other people, as much as speaking in a presentation or a conversation. Like any skill, presenting one’s own argument for evaluation is polished only through practice. My students write multiple papers throughout the term. The first is followed by one-on-one conferences with each student, where I help them to plan the revised draft I require of that paper. Having struggled throughout college with anxiety about presenting my writing to others, I am sensitive to discomfort approaching one’s professors. Because the students are required to meet with me, the pressure that comes with approaching an instructor is mitigated. I use the conference as an opportunity to couple the demanding criticism of a reader with the guidance of a mentor, to show them that the two are of a piece with one another. My goal is for students to receive criticism as part of the writing process from which they can learn, rather than an evaluation that occurs once the process is over. Their writing is an instrument of learning – both their own, and ultimately that of others.

I am currently working on differentiating the means by which I solicit student feedback, and encouraging them to self-evaluate. It is easy to observe the students who are the most eager to speak up, but their willingness to participate can be a challenge to gauging the classroom as a whole. As a part of their participation in class, I have students write one minute response papers in which they assess their own understanding, and ask any questions they may have. If there are common themes to the questions, or misconceptions in what students have taken away from the lesson, I begin the next class by articulating the connection between the students’ responses and the day’s agenda. I also plan to include self-evaluation as a part of the revision process for the initial term paper. Each of my students has different needs and expectations for each course. My aim is to enable them to identify these needs, to articulate them, and to meet them self-sufficiently.



# Teaching Biography

## Whitehead's Metaphysics and Ethics, Winter 2012 (T.A.)

The course comprised approximately twenty graduate students from Ph.D. and master's degree programs (both A.M. and M.Div) including one student from one of the other institutions in the Hyde Park Theological Cluster. Having taken the course twice before—both for credit and as an auditor, I was familiar both with the material and the trajectory of the course. Professor Gamwell's courses are a hybrid of traditional lectures, which strategically open for discussion at key junctures (an approach I seek to emulate where possible). To compliment this style, I used the supplementary sessions for two purposes. The first was to prime students to both anticipate questions that might arise in the plenary meeting, and to formulate their own questions both precisely and in a way that would benefit the entire class. Second, I wanted to provide an opportunity for students to raise questions that were relevant to their own projects, but which would not so obviously have contributed to the class's general understanding of the material. So that both goals mutually informed rather than rivaling one another for time and attention, I developed my "questions first" approach to organizing discussions.

## Introduction to the Study of Religion, Autumn 2013 (T.A.)

This is a graduate lecture course required for all entering A.M, M.Div. and A.M.R.S. students at the Divinity School. The course is divided into two halves: The first five weeks focus on a key figure or text in the study of religion – for 2013 Paul Ricoeur's metaphysics and hermeneutics. For the second half, faculty from each department in the Divinity School give conference-style presentations on their current work in conjunction with a classical text in the study of religion. The teaching assistants attended lectures, led weekly discussion groups with a subsection of the class (including students in each of the three degree programs), graded papers, held conferences for reviewing papers, and co-administered oral exams at the end of the term.

In this course, I further honed my questions first approach, opening each class meeting by inviting student questions, which I would write on the board. In an introductory course, my job is to model conventions of academy, which means that there is an extra step: I write the first question on a separate section of the board, as close to verbatim as possible. I then have the student help me to re-draft the question, much as they would a thesis statement for a paper, until it is as clear and concise as possible. The final draft of the question goes up in the corner of the board and we repeat this until we have several polished questions. Over the course of the term, the students will adopt the practice of drafting independently, and the questions they ask are more polished at the outset. This would not be feasible in the plenary session with over forty students, but in my discussion section of fourteen, it works well. It is especially important because of the course is required of all first year A.M., A.M.R.S., and M.Div. students. These three master's degree programs have different objectives, and the students entering each program have different academic and professional backgrounds at the outset. Since the norms of the course are uniform, it is crucial that all of our students can share in this preparation.

#### **Logic and Argument, Spring 2014 (Instructor)**

I taught my first standalone course – “Logic and Argument” – in the Spring semester of 2014 at Saint Xavier University, as a last-minute replacement for a professor on medical leave. Topics covered include syllogistic logic using the rules-based method and Venn diagrams; propositional logic using truth-tables, tableaux, and natural deduction; rhetorical analysis; informal fallacies; and meta-logic. The student base for this course was more diverse than for the Introduction to the Study of Religion – comprising undergraduates taking it as part of their philosophy major, or as one of the core requirements, or to supplement analytic reasoning skills for programs such as computer science or pre-law. While the formal nature of the subject does not lend itself to discussion in the same way as do other topics in philosophy or religion, student engagement is important to me, and I sought to elicit student involvement whenever possible. To achieve this, I experimented with methods drawn from the sciences. At the start of each class, students pick up colored index cards before going to their seats. We now have a way for each student to communicate easily and simultaneously with me and with one another. I can check for comprehension by giving a multiple choice exercise from the book, and assigning a color to each option. Having the students put their heads down mitigates some of the anxiety associated with answering in front of the class, and by having them reveal their answers at the same time, it is visually obvious to me if they try to change their answers or simply

copy the response of the majority of students. This gives me a more accurate sense of their comprehension, and I can immediately decide whether I should move on or offer an alternate explanation of the topic. I can also divide them into groups by having them raise their heads and partner for discussion with someone holding a different colored card.

### The Examined Life, Autumn 2014 (Instructor)

In the Autumn of 2014, I was invited back to SXU – this time to teach the core philosophy course required of all first-year students, “The Examined Life”. All sections read Plato’s *Apology*, but otherwise instructors design the class as they see fit. I chose to focus on the topic of death as a challenge to the significance of one’s actions. The class read works from Pascal, Nietzsche, and concluded with a novella by Cormac McCarthy. I used this opportunity in conjunction with my fellowship at the Marty Center, to relate the course to a theme of my dissertation – in my case the topic of human finitude. I chose to have a major assignment involve a revision of the paper for my class. Students submit a paper for a grade with relatively low stakes, and I meet with each of them for an individual conference to discuss the form and content of their essay. I help them to plan revisions, which they submit a week later for an additional grade. When the department chair observed my teaching, he noticed my use of index cards and commented that he will try to incorporate this practice himself.

I have received an appointment to teach the course again in the Autumn of 2015. This time, I will be teaching two sections. I plan to compose a different syllabus, focused on a new theme.



# Appendix I: Syllabuses and Student Learning Documents

**Syllabi:** I have included the syllabus for each of two courses taught at Saint Xavier University in the Spring and Fall of 2014 (indicated by course number in the header).

**Syllabus One** is for *The Examined Life* as taught in Autumn semester, 2014 (see teaching biography).

**Syllabus Two** is for *Logic and Argument* as taught in the Spring semester, 2014 (see teaching biography).

**Syllabus Three** is for a proposed course, *Theistic Proof* (no course number or contact is provided for the proposed course). It reflects changes based on experiences from previous courses, as well as assignments appropriate for more advanced students.

## Syllabus One

Philosophy 140-13: The Examined Life: \_\_\_\_\_ MWF 8:00 - 8:50 AM

Instructor: Jason Cather office: Warde N413; office hours: M,F 9:00-10:00 AM

contact: cather@sxu.edu

### **Course Description:**

Socrates states that the unexamined life is not worth living. But does this mean that by examining one's life, one can make life worth living? In light of the inevitability of death, what does it mean to say that life is or is not worth living? In our section of *The Examined Life* we will read three thinkers with vastly different answers to these questions, who challenge our lives with the claims they make, and we will formulate our own responses to these challenges.

Reflecting Saint Xavier University's commitment to the Catholic tradition of preparing students for a lifelong reflection on ethical values, Philosophy 140 is required of all incoming first-year students. The course introduces students to the close reading and analysis of primary texts (both in speech and in writing) required at the college level. Primarily the course aims to develop in students a propensity to examine critically and continually the concepts and attitudes that shape our lives. Plato's *Apology* of Socrates (from which the course derives its name) serves as the common reading across all sections of the course, and all sections of the course will focus on primary texts in the history of philosophy. Rather than merely surveying a variety of philosophical topics or views, the primary aim of the course is to introduce to students to the discipline by engaging them in the activity of ethical reflection and philosophical thinking. As a required course for all first-year students, Philosophy 140 plays an integral role in the First-Year Learning experience and the General Education Program. The Department seeks in this way to provide a substantive introduction to a discipline that facilitates the aims and objectives of the General Education Curriculum and the First-Year Learning Experience.

### **Academic Integrity:**

The University's full statement on academic integrity can be found at:

<http://catalog.sxu.edu/chicago/Shared/ACA/integrity.html>

The policy for academic integrity in this course is very straightforward: I expect that any work submitted for this course will be your own. Never submit another's work as your own. This goes for any unit of writing, down to a sentence, or a memorable phrase. If someone else wrote it first, you *must* cite it, and give credit to the original author. Any submission of another's work as your own constitutes plagiarism. Any instance of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment, and makeup will not be allowed. I will be happy to meet with you during office hours to discuss any questions you may have about what constitutes plagiarism.

### **Learning Outcomes:** Students will be able to:

- > Read philosophical texts closely, identifying the argument of the text and restating it clearly and fairly in their own words.
- > Critically assess arguments in terms of the assumptions made and the structure of reasoning to a conclusion.
- > Formulate and defend a philosophical thesis with evidence and careful reasoning both in speech and writing.



## GRADING POLICIES

FOR COMPLETE GRADING POLICIES, PLEASE REFER TO THE ONLINE VERSION OF THE SYLLABUS.

### **Grading Scale:**

- \* Successful, on time completion of all work at an acceptable level = **C**
- \* On time completion of work at a high level, indicating significant effort beyond the level of acceptable = **B**
- \* On time completion of excellent work, indicating a very high level of effort, exceeding expectations = **A**
- \* Late or incomplete work, or work at a level lower than expected = **D**
- \* Little or no work completed, excessively late work, or otherwise unacceptable work = **F**

### **Credit Will Be Given For the Following:**

- i.) A set of typed one-page responses to the texts, due every week on Monday or Wednesday, based on prompts given in class (aka “homework”). (20 points)
- ii.) A midterm paper due in week five, based on a prompt to be assigned. (10 points)
- iii.) A conference and subsequent revision to your midterm paper, due one week after your conference. (20 points)
- iv.) A midterm paper due in week eleven(20 points)
- v.) A final paper on a topic to be assigned in class. (30 points)

### **NO EXTRA OR MAKEUP CREDIT WILL BE OFFERED:**

As a policy, I do not offer makeup credit or extra credit on request. In the interests of training you for your lives ahead, deadlines are firm. I will give you ample opportunities to demonstrate your work throughout the term. I have designed assignments to allow you to recover from earlier difficulties if you are struggling. However, none of the work you will do is “extra” and assignments are due when they are due.

### *A Note on Exams and Quizzes*

All devices must be turned off (or on silent) and left in your bags under your desks during exams and quizzes. No use of these devices is permitted during an exam or quiz. If you leave the classroom, you are not permitted to return during the exam or quiz. Any violation of this policy will be considered cheating. Any communication between students during exams or quizzes will be considered cheating. Unless otherwise noted, all exams and quizzes are closed book, and the unauthorized use of notes or textbooks will be considered cheating. Any cheating on an exam or a quiz will result in a grade of zero for that exam or quiz.

### **Course Policies:**

1.) Use of technology in the Classroom: I strongly advise taking notes on paper (cf. “materials” below). Please do not allow your laptops, tablets, phones, etc. to be a distraction to you, to your fellow students, or to me. Take care of all socializing (e.g. facebook, texting, emails) outside of our classroom. If you need to use your phone for whatever reason, you may quietly leave the classroom and return when you are finished. If you cause a distraction, you will be asked to leave for the remainder of the class, even if we are near the end of class. You may return the next day of class with a clean slate. To clarify: if *you* are capable of quietly leaving and taking care of your business, you may return to class, provided you can do so without disruption. If *I* have to ask you to leave, you will be dismissed for the day. In either case, *you* are responsible for whatever you missed. Do not ask me to repeat it, it is *your responsibility*.

2.) On emailing me: I encourage each of you to email me if you have substantive questions concerning the material we are discussing in class. Please do not e-mail me to ask if you can make up the assignment (you cannot). Do not e-mail me to ask what you missed if you were absent. There will be regular quizzes designed to test you on the material covered up to that point in the term. There will be no make-up quizzes offered — the same holds true for the essay assignments and conferences.

3.) Canvas: Homework assignments, revisions to the syllabus, and grades will be posted to the Canvas site. The print copy of the syllabus is for your convenience, however the authoritative version is online.

**Attendance and Participation:** There are no make-up assignments or quizzes. Record the due dates now and do not miss on those days. I expect you to attend and participate every day. While your final grade will not be directly penalized for absences, I will take attendance for my records. You will not be able to succeed if you are absent regularly and your grades will reflect this fact.

### **Texts:**

- > Plato: *Apology*, entire (handout)
- > Blaise Pascal: *Pensees*, selections (handout)
- > Friedrich Nietzsche: *On Truth and Lying in an Extramoral Sense*, entire (handout)
- > Cormac McCarthy: *The Sunset Limited*, entire (available from the bookstore or online)

### **Materials:**

1.) You will receive a course reading packet at the beginning of the term. You are expected to keep up with the packet throughout the entire semester. Any additional materials will be distributed in class in advance of their due date. You are responsible for getting copies of materials from classes you missed. Bring every text to every class meeting. Reading and homework assignments will be listed on Canvas. While I will try to announce all readings and assignments in class, you are expected to check this regularly. If you miss class or forget to write them down, check Canvas first and then ask another student in the class. Do not email me to ask what the assignment is.

2.) You are required to bring paper and a pencil or pen to each class. There will be regular quizzes and short writing assignments to be completed and turned in during the class. Loose leaf or detachable paper is suggested for this purpose. I **strongly** recommend that notes be taken on paper. I strongly *discourage* taking notes on your computer. This will actually be to your advantage, because we will be using symbols, diagrams, and tables, all of which are difficult to format on a computer at the pace we will be proceeding.

3.) The works we will be reading have a long and rich tradition of scholarship. Many, many people have read these texts, and there are no doubt countless study guides and interpretive essays that may be easy to find online. Rather than spending time reading these guides *about* our texts (scholars call these “secondary sources”), you should spend that time re-reading the texts themselves (the “primary sources”). Do not be tempted to plagiarize from these guides-- if you can find it, it is likely that I can find it as well, and this will result in a failing grade (see “academic integrity”) . All of my students have the integrity to do their own work. Cheating will not help you to understand the material, but will actually prevent you from learning it. More importantly, whatever ‘points’ you think you might earn from cheating are not worth compromising your integrity. At the end of your life, you probably will not remember or care about the grade you made in this class. You *will* reflect on whether you lived with honesty and integrity.

### **Division of Course:**

This is our course outline. I reserve the right to adjust the schedule, in which event I will place the revised version on Canvas. The online version is the official version, and you are responsible for the assignments listed there.

**I. week 1:** Introduction. We will discuss the expectations of the course, the course assignments, and briefly review how to construct an argument.

**II. weeks 2-4:** Plato’s *Apology*.

**FIRST ESSAY DUE:** September 22

**III. weeks 5-7:** Pascal’s *Pensees*.

**PAPER CONFERENCES:** October 6-10

**REVISIONS DUE:** One week after your conference date.

**IV. weeks 8-10:** Nietzsche’s *Truth and Lying...*

**SECOND ESSAY DUE:** November 5

**V. weeks 11-12:** McCarthy’s *Sunset Limited*

**VI. weeks 13-15:** Conclusion

**FINAL ESSAY DUE:** December 3

## Syllabus Two

**Philosophy 210: Logic and Argument:** Graham School MWF 1:00-1:50

**Instructor: Jason Cather** office: Warde N413; office hours: 2:00-3:00 W/F  
contact: cather@sxu.edu

### **Synopsis:**

This course will cover syllogistic and propositional logic. We will begin by examining validity and soundness, then translate declarative sentences into syllogistic logic. We will move on to propositional logic, proofs, and induction, and finally a discussion of informal fallacies.

**Learning Outcomes:** Students will be able to:

- > distinguish soundness and validity of arguments
- > assess the validity of arguments they encounter
- > construct their own well-reasoned arguments

### **Credit Will Be Given For the Following:**

- a) Midterm 1: February 19th (20% of final grade)
- b) Midterm 2: (25% of final grade)
- c) Final Exam (30% of final grade)
- d) Homework sets and quizzes (25% of final grade)

**No extra credit or makeup credit will be offered.**

### *A Note on Your Homework and Quiz Grade*

You are expected to complete your homework on at least level 7. If you do all of your homework at level 7 and make 100% on every quiz, you can earn up to 100 points for your H/Q grade. If you complete your homework at level 8 or level 9, you will have the opportunity to earn more than 100 points on your H/Q grade. You are encouraged to do this! The extra points will be “insurance” for your quiz grades (i.e. you can miss some questions on a quiz and still earn the full 100 points on the final H/Q grade). *HOWEVER*, these insurance points will *not* transfer to the other grades. *Please do not ask me for this - the answer is no.*

### *A Note on Exams and Quizzes*

All devices must be turned off (or on silent) and left in your bags under your desks during exams and quizzes. No use of these devices is permitted during an exam or quiz. If you leave the classroom, you are not permitted to return during the exam or quiz. Any violation of this policy will be considered cheating. Any communication between students during exams or quizzes will be considered cheating. All exams and quizzes are closed book, and the use of notes or textbooks will be considered cheating. Any cheating on an exam or a quiz will result in a grade of zero for that exam or quiz.

### **Course Policies:**

**1.) Use of technology in the Classroom:** I strongly advise taking notes on paper (cf. “materials” below). Please do not allow your laptops, tablets, phones, etc. to be a distraction to you, your fellow students, or to me. Take care of all socializing (e.g. facebook, texting, emails) outside of our classroom. If you need to use your phone for whatever reason, you may quietly leave the classroom

and return when you are finished. If you cause a distraction, you will be asked to leave for the remainder of the class, even if we are near the end of class. You may return the next day of class with a clean slate. To clarify: if *you* are capable of quietly leaving and taking care of your business, you may return to class, provided you can do so without disruption. If *I* have to ask you to leave, you will be dismissed for the day. In either case, *you* are responsible for whatever you missed. Do not ask me to repeat it, it is *your responsibility*.

2.) On emailing me: Students are encouraged to email me if they have substantive questions concerning the material we are discussing in class (provided they were in attendance.) You should, however, **not** email me to tell me that you have missed, or will miss, a class. You should also **not** email me to ask what you missed in a class for which you were not in attendance or to ask if you can make up the assignment (you cannot). There will be regular quizzes designed to test you on the material covered up to that point in the semester. There will be no make-up quizzes offered — the same holds true for the Midterms and the Final.

3.) Blackboard: Homework assignments, revisions to the syllabus, and grades will be posted to the blackboard site.

**Attendance and Participation:** There are no make-up tests or quizzes. Record the test dates now and do not miss on those days. I expect you to attend and participate every day. Logic is very challenging, and more than any other aspect of philosophy, it is *cumulative*. If you do not put in the time and effort to master the earlier topics, you will be lost as the course progresses. While your final grade will not be directly penalized for absences, I will take attendance for my records, and you will not be able to succeed if you are absent regularly. Your grades will reflect this fact.

**Texts:**

Harry Gensler: *Introduction to Logic*

LogiCola software: <http://harryhiker.com/lc/index.htm>

Other Short Selections TBD (to be placed on Blackboard)

**Materials:**

1.) Students are required to bring paper and a pencil or pen to each class. There will be regular quizzes and short writing assignments to be completed and turned in during the class. Loose leaf or detachable paper is suggested for this purpose. I **strongly** recommend that notes be taken on paper. I strongly *discourage* taking notes on your computer. This will actually be to your advantage because we will be using symbols, diagrams, and tables, all of which are difficult to format on a computer at the pace we will be proceeding.

2.) Reading and homework assignments will be listed on blackboard. I will announce all readings and assignments in class. You are expected to check this regularly. If you miss class or forget to write them down, check blackboard first and then ask another student in the class. Do not email me requesting the assignment.

3.) Your homework will be done via Gensler's LogiCola program. Students are required to download the program. It is available for free at <http://harryhiker.com/lc/index.htm> and can be downloaded

directly to your computer, or placed on a flash disk and used on any computer. The program allows you to retake the problem set as many times as you like, and to report your highest scores.

4.) I am aware that many study guides and homework solutions are available online. You may use these to help you study, but you are expected to do the homework on your own. This is, of course, on the honor system - I assume that my students have the integrity to do their own work. Cheating on your homework will not help you to understand the material, but will actually prevent you from learning it. More importantly, whatever 'points' you might earn from cheating are not worth compromising your integrity. At the end of your life, you probably will not remember or care about the grade you made in this class. You *will* reflect on whether you lived with honesty and integrity.

**Division of Course: We will adjust the schedule as necessary but this is our plan. I have listed the chapters are listed from Gensler's book (1.2 = chapter one, section two; etc.).**

**I.** weeks 1-2: Validity and Soundness (See assignments for selections from Chapters 1 and 2)

**II.** weeks 3-4: Sylogistic Logic (See assignments for selections from Chapters 1 and 2)

**IN CLASS EXAM 1:** February 7th

**III.** weeks 5-9: Propositional Logic (Chapter 6, selections and schedule TBA)

**IV.** weeks 10-12: Deductive and Inductive proofs (Chapters 5 and 7, selections and schedule TBA )

**IN CLASS EXAM 2:** April 14th

**V.** weeks 13-15: Informal Fallacies (Chapters 3 and 4, selections and schedule TBA )

## Syllabus Three

### **Theistic Proof and its Criticism**

#### Course Conception:

The theistic question (“Does God exist?”) is frequently assumed to be a question that cannot be settled rationally. But in the philosophy of religion, there is a rich tradition of attempts to demonstrate the existence of God, as well as of detractors from these attempts. We will examine a thread of this tradition that runs up through the twentieth century, affirming the rationality of the question. We will encounter the most significant critic of this line of argument and consider how his criticisms are dealt with by the tradition.

This course is aimed at students with previous course experience in the philosophy/religion department. This should not be understood to exclude those who are interested in entering into the world of philosophy by tackling this difficult topic. Any such students with at least sophomore standing are encouraged to enroll, but must meet with me to discuss expectations of the course before receiving permission to enroll. Students taking the course as an elective are welcome, but in the overwhelming likelihood that the gripping subject coupled with my devastating wit and charisma draws too many students, priority will be given to those who are taking it to fulfill requirements of a major or minor.

#### Texts:

Anselm:           *Proslogion*  
Aquinas:         *Summa Theologia* (sections)  
Hartshorne:     *The Divine Relativity*  
                      *A Natural Theology for Our Time*  
(All of these have been ordered at the bookstore)

Short selections (to be placed on reserve)

Kant:             *Critique of Pure Reason* (selections)  
Hartshorne:     "What Did Anselm Discover?"

#### Integrity:

The policy for academic integrity in this course is very straightforward: I expect that any work submitted for this course will be your own. Never submit another’s work as your own. This goes for any unit of writing, down to a sentence, or a memorable phrase. If someone else wrote it first, you *must* cite it, giving credit to the original author. Any submission of another’s work as your own constitutes plagiarism. Any instance of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment, and makeup will not be allowed. I will be happy to meet with you during office hours to discuss any questions you may have about what constitutes plagiarism.

### Learning Outcomes:

You will practice and improve your ability to do the following:

- 1.) Read philosophical texts closely, identify and restate the thesis and argument clearly and charitably in your own words.
- 2.) Critically assess these arguments in terms of the assumptions they make and the structure by which they reason to their conclusions.
- 3.) Formulate and defend a philosophical thesis with evidence and careful reasoning both in speech and writing.

### GRADING

FOR COMPLETE COURSE POLICIES, INCLUDING THOSE ON GRADES, PLEASE REFER TO THE ONLINE VERSION OF THE SYLLABUS. YOU ARE ACCOUNTABLE FOR ADHERING TO ALL POLICIES.

### Grading Scale:

- Successful, on time completion of all work at an acceptable level = **C**
- On time completion of work at a high level that indicates significant effort beyond the acceptable level = **B**
- On time completion of excellent work that indicates a very high level of effort exceeding expectations = **A**
- Incomplete work or work at a level lower than expected = **D**
- Little or no work completed or otherwise unacceptable work = **F**

### Assignments:

As a budding scholar, you are the owner of your own education. These assignments are a supplementary aid for your understanding of the skills and materials you are expected to learn. Your grades will serve as a point of reference for you and others to note the degree to which you carefully complete these assignments throughout the term.

**I.** 50 points of your grade will be based on the following two assignments:

- (1.) A presentation of approximately 10 minutes (about 5 pages when typed out)

**AND**

- (2.) A midterm paper 7-10 pages in length

The purpose of these requirements is to provide you with experience both writing and speaking in an academic setting. Because I recognize that some will be more or less comfortable speaking, I will allow you to weigh the assignments in one of the following ways: 30/20, 20/30, or 25/25. Each assignment must count for at least 20 points. You must notify me of your choice at the time you submit your midterm, or I will count each as 25 points.



**II.** The remaining 50 points of your grade will be earned from your choice of either option (3) or both (4.a) and (4.b)

3) A final paper 15 pages in length (worth 50 points)

**OR**

4.a) A final paper 15 pages in length (worth 40 points)

**AND**

4.b) A series of short (1-2 typed pages) responses to the readings (worth 10 points).

I expect you to meet with me during office hours to discuss your presentation, and to confirm your paper topics in a brief e-mail or comment after class.

Re-writing papers: If you feel that a paper you have written for class does not reflect the best work you can do, please meet with me for office hours. With certain stipulations, I reserve the right to accept revised papers on a case-by-case basis. Those stipulations include:

- a. A face-to-face meeting with me to determine the terms of the revision,
- b. Initial on-time completion of the assignment. This is not a makeup assignment or an extension to the original deadline.
- c. Substantial evidence that revision will more closely reflect your other efforts in class (at my discretion). This is not simply a do-over, but a means to more closely reflect other effort that the assignment may have missed.

**NO EXTRA OR MAKEUP CREDIT WILL BE OFFERED!**

As a policy, I do not offer makeup credit or extra credit on request. In the interests of training you for your lives ahead, deadlines are firm. I will give you ample opportunities to demonstrate your work throughout the term. I have designed assignments to allow you to recover from earlier difficulties if you are struggling. However, none of the work you will do is “extra” and assignments are due when they are due.

**Division of Course:**

This is our course outline. I reserve the right to adjust the schedule, in which event I will place the revised version online.

**I. How to construct a philosophical argument: a crash-course in logic** (2 classes).

**II. Aquinas** (weeks 2-3)

**III. Anselm** (weeks 4-6)

MIDTERMS DUE WEEK SIX

**IV. Kant** (weeks 7-9)

**V. Hartshorne** (weeks 10-13)

**VI. Conclusion** (weeks 14-15)

FINALS DUE WEEK FIFTEEN

**E-mail exchange:** This is an extended response I wrote as a teaching assistant to an e-mail from a student struggling to understand an analytic tool used by the professor. Students are required identify the problem, thesis, argument, and implications (PTAI) of . . . The student's background was in an unrelated field, making high-level graduate work very difficult. I used a mundane example to illustrate an abstract concept in a low-anxiety setting. Because the student had self-identified as a visual learner, I differentiated the instruction by using color coding to reinforce the organization of the concept.

3/17/2015

RE: PTAI for upcoming paper

**RE: PTAI for upcoming paper**

M  
Sent: Friday, November 22, 2013 7:10 PM  
To: Jason G Cather

Thank you!!! This is super helpful. Your explanation really spells out (with a great simple example) for how this structure is supposed to function. It also makes sense that the argument, in this case, is MINE, in that I incorporate my own claim from my reading of the texts instead of just identifying a claim from the texts that's already there (I think that's where I was getting caught up). It had occurred to me that my formulation of PTAI produced a rather superficial-looking paper, and so I'm thankful that you were able to point that out. This definitely helps. Thanks for your very clear and thoughtful response.

M

From: Jason G Cather  
Sent: Friday, November 22, 2013 2:23 PM  
To:  
Subject: RE: PTAI for upcoming paper

M

I think that explicitly stating your P.T.A.I. is a good way to prepare to write this paper (or any paper, really). As you state it here, it doesn't seem right to me, and I see two kinds of problems in your formulation. One is conceptual, and the other substantive. I am going to ignore the implication for now (not because I think that it is unproblematic, but because there is plenty to focus on with the other three parts).

Let's start with the conceptual. You have a start on the problem/motivating concern portion. What you put forward does count as a motivating concern. I think you are having trouble conceptualizing what qualifies as a thesis and what qualifies as an argument. It may help to think of it this way: Your **thesis** is an **answer** to the **question** that is the **problem** motivating the paper. Your **argument** is **why** (in the sense of the **reasons** someone should think that your thesis is correct. So a very simplified version may look like this: **We are hungry; where should we eat? We should eat at Z&H on 57th Street because it is near campus, and serves good sandwiches, and we both like sandwiches.** What you list as your argument looks more like a thesis. Now, you've probably noticed that what you list under T does answer the question you list under P. So why isn't that a thesis? The answer has to do with the word "how" in your question. "How" actually has two meanings:

(1) By what means (or method)? and (2) What is the characterization of something? It helps me to think of this joke: The doctor asks, "How do you feel?" and the patient says, "With my hands." The patient is answering the question "how" in the sense of (1) (she is saying in effect, I feel by means of my hands). But the doctor means "how" in the sense of (2) (the doctor is asking, do you feel sick to your stomach? or do you feel healthy?). What you list under T is an answer to "how" in sense (1), and what you list under A is an answer to "how" in sense (2). If you were to answer "how" in sense (1), you would actually be offering a very simplified gloss on the respective methods of the two thinkers (i.e. **the way THEY go about making THEIR arguments.** This may work as a statement of the method of Ricoeur and Doniger, but it does not qualify as a claim YOU are making). If you were to choose to answer this question, the most you could offer by way of an argument would look something like this: Ricoeur cites Augustine many times, while Doniger cites various Hindu myths. This isn't really the sort of thing that could develop into a paper. So let's look at answering "how" in sense (2) instead.

The answer to "how" in sense (2) is what you list under A. This is actually a slightly better thesis than your listing under T. So your project looks more like this:

**P: What character (quality) do R/D ascribe to time as they conceptualize it in their respective texts? T: For Ricoeur (drawing on Augustine), time is linear... For Doniger (drawing on Hindu myth) it is cyclical.**

<https://mail.uchicago.edu/>

1/2

<https://mail.uchicago.edu/>

22

3/17/2015

RE: PTAI for upcoming paper

You now should think about your argument. This brings me to the substantive problem. With the new P and T above, the substance of your paper appears to be merely a summary of Ricoeur and Doniger, rather than an advancing of a claim of your own. This summary may not be wrong -- Ricoeur may well think time is linear, Doniger (in her presentation of Hindu myth) may well represent it as cyclical. But by itself, this is not a substantive engagement of the texts. Just to be clear, you are expected to summarize the text as part of the assignment, but this is to take at most one page. For the meat of your paper, we are looking for you to advance a claim. At the graduate level, strong papers will have this feature.

One example of a constructive claim might be that **narrative cannot function as presented by Ricoeur's reading of Aristotle, if we assume Doniger's presentation of the cyclical model of time in Hindu Myth.** Another example then would be the converse claim that **Aristotle's narrative theory can still function even given the cyclical model of time.** (N.B. I wouldn't necessarily advise you to make either of these arguments. In part, this is because I just came up with them, and haven't thought about the issue, so I can't say whether one is obviously wrong, or one is significantly stronger than the other. I would also advise against either of the claims claim because it seems difficult to prove in just four pages. Moreover, part of the assignment -- which is meant to present you with the challenges of graduate level work -- is that the topic on which you write should be one of your own choosing.)

I hope that this is helpful for you.

-J.C.

From: M

Sent: Thursday, November 21, 2013 11:15 PM

To: Jason G Cather

Subject: PTAI for upcoming paper

Hi Jason,

I just developed my topic for the paper due next week (which I will write this weekend and send to you by Monday) and did the whole PTAI thing (see below). Can you let me know if it looks alright?

Thanks  
M

Topic: Concept of Time in Ricoeur and Doniger

P: How do Ricoeur and Doniger conceptualize time in their texts? (T&N and "Forgetting and Reawakening")

T: Ricoeur draws on Augustinian concepts of time and Doniger draws on Hindu concepts of time

A: For Ricoeur/Augustine, time is linear, characterized by past-present-future (3-fold present), distentio/ intentio. For Doniger, time is cyclical, reincarnation/karma theory.

I: Ricoeur's conception of time and Doniger's conceptions of time are different; each reflects time from world views based on different religions

24 . APPENDIX I: SYLLABUSES AND STUDENT LEARNING DOCUMENTS

**Rubric:** This is a general writing rubric, with standards for any constructive or argumentative paper I assign. It is available online, and in my courses for first-year undergraduates, we discuss the rubric before the first assignment. When I meet students for conferences after their initial draft of an assignment, I fill out a version of this rubric in front of them, and return it with the draft for editing. With assignments where students are expected to cite specific materials, or demonstrate a specific skill set by the department, I develop a rubric for that assignment based on this template.

## General Rubric for Papers:

Criteria	High	Acceptable	Below Expectations
<p><b>Grammar and Rhetoric:</b> The paper is free of grammar and spelling errors. Sentences are clear and to the point. The essay advances an original thesis that addresses the prompt (where applicable).</p>	<p>There are no spelling errors. The grammar of every sentence is clear and in an appropriately formal register. The writing is concise, and the prompt is addressed in a straightforward manner.</p>	<p>The essay is relatively free of errors. Any existing errors are minor and do not interfere with the reading of the essay. The essay is in an appropriately formal register. There is minimal filler language. The prompt is adequately addressed.</p>	<p>The essay contains spelling or grammar errors that interfere with the reader's ability to understand the essay. There is an excess of unclear language, inappropriate or insufficiently formal language. There is an excess of filler language. The prompt is addressed insufficiently or ignored.</p>
<p><b>Clarity/Precision of the Argument:</b> The thesis is clearly identifiable. The terms of the argument are clear and consistent, as is the argument itself. A rule of thumb is that I should be able to summarize your thesis after a single reading, and it should be recognizable to someone else who has read your paper.</p>	<p>The thesis is clearly identifiable as are the steps in the argument. There is no inconsistent or equivocal use of terms.  Every sentence contributes to the thesis or a necessary step for proving it.</p>	<p>The thesis and the steps of the argument are identifiable. There is no inconsistent or equivocal use of terms.  Most sentences contribute to the thesis or a necessary step for proving it.</p>	<p>There is no identifiable thesis, premises in the argument are unclear, or it is unclear how the thesis follows from the premises. Terms are applied equivocally or used vaguely or are not adequately defined. There is substantial language that does not contribute to the argument.</p>
<p><b>Evidence and Citation:</b> The thesis is argued for with adequate evidence that can be found in or validly inferred from the text. Adequate citation of the text and any outside sources is made.</p>	<p>Every contestable claim is based on or inferred from the text. The text is quoted or paraphrased in a way that indicates an accurate understanding, and is correctly cited. No major inferential errors are committed.</p>	<p>A clear attempt is made to argue for thesis through valid inference. Technical, correctable errors of inference will be commented on, and future effort to avoid them is expected. Inferences are sufficiently based on the text. Citations from the text indicate an adequate understanding of the relevant passages. All references to the text and any outside sources are appropriately indicated. There may be technical errors in citation, but there are no omissions.</p>	<p>The thesis is merely asserted rather than argued for. Major errors of inference are made; the inference does not follow or is without basis. Little or no textual evidence is offered, or cited evidence misconstrues the text, or otherwise indicates an inadequate understanding.  If there is any uncited outside contribution to the text, no credit will be given for the assignment.</p>

**Grading Policies:** The grading policy is included on the syllabus, along with a reference to the online version. I list my grading scale beginning with the grade of C, rather than with A as is perhaps more standard. This encourages students to think of grades as markers of progress rather than as punitive. Many students operate on the (implicit) assumption that they begin the course with an A, and thus lose points with every assignment. I want them to think of their grades as a reflection of the work they do throughout the term. I tell them this at the outset, and this scale helps to reinforce that message.

**Other Policies:** My classes rely heavily on discussion, which requires attention and respect toward everyone in the room. These policies are my attempt at setting the basic norms for respect for the classroom setting.

**Frequently Asked Questions:** I include this with the grading policies online, since so much of it focuses on explanation of my grading policy. The extended discussion is designed to reinforce the understanding of grades markers of progress.

## **GRADING POLICIES**

### **Integrity:**

The policy for academic integrity in this course is very straightforward: I expect that any work submitted for this course will be your own. Never submit another's work as your own. This goes for any unit of writing, down to a sentence, or a memorable phrase. If someone else wrote it first, you *must* cite it, giving credit to the original author. Any submission of another's work as your own constitutes plagiarism. Any instance of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment, and makeup will not be allowed. I will be happy to meet with you during office hours to discuss any questions you may have about what constitutes plagiarism.

### **Grading Scale:**

- Successful, on time completion of all work at an acceptable level = **C**
- On time completion of work at a high level that indicates significant effort beyond the acceptable level = **B**
- On time completion of excellent work that indicates a very high level of effort exceeding expectations = **A**
- Incomplete work or work at a level lower than expected = **D**
- Little or no work completed or otherwise unacceptable work = **F**

### **No Extra or Makeup Credit Will Be Offered**

As a policy, I do not offer makeup credit or extra credit on request. In the interests of training you for your lives ahead, deadlines are firm. I will give you ample opportunities to demonstrate your work throughout the term. I have designed assignments to allow you to recover from earlier difficulties if you are struggling. However, none of the work you will do is "extra" and assignments are due when they are due.

### **Attendance and Participation:**

There are no make-up assignments or quizzes. Record the due dates now and do not miss on those days. I expect you to attend and participate every day. While your final grade will not be *directly* penalized for absences, I will take attendance for my records. You will not be able to succeed if you are absent regularly and your grades will reflect this fact.

### **Grade Changes:**

In certain instances, I may choose to change your grade. If you feel that I have made an error in calculating your grade, you may arrange to meet me during my office hours. I will not change your grade because you "need a better grade" for whatever reason. See the frequently asked questions for information about improving your grade.

## **ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES**

1.) Classroom Decorum: By virtue of attending this institution, you are part of an academic community. Our classroom is a unit of this community, and you are expected to be model citizens. Everyone in the class is expected to engage respectfully with one another. It is of the nature of philosophical conversations, especially those about the topic of religion, to be controversial. Your views may be challenged by others, who in turn may challenge your views. Our classroom is not a place where your ideas will be safe from scrutiny. However, this will always proceed in a civil manner, according to intellectual norms. If you feel that you were not treated in a civil manner, please arrange to see me in office hours. If you would prefer to remain anonymous, you may type a comment to me and leave it in the box outside my office.

2.) Use of technology in the Classroom: I strongly advise taking notes on paper (cf. “materials” below). Please do not allow your laptops, tablets, phones, etc. to be a distraction to you, to your fellow students, or to me. When we have an in-class exam, quiz, or other writing assignment, you will place your phone face-down on silent for the duration. Any interaction with your device, including removing it from the room if you leave, will be treated as cheating.

3.) Course Website: Homework assignments, revisions to the syllabus, and grades will be announced in class. I will post any revisions to the syllabus to the course website when they are made. The print copy of the syllabus is for your convenience, however in the event of revisions, the online version will be authoritative. While major assignments will be posted online, weekly assignments will not. To incentivize regular attendance, weekly assignments will be announced in class only.

4.) Communication: My preferred means of communication is in person. This avoids misunderstandings, and allows me to know whether I have successfully addressed your concerns. In principle, I am happy to stay to answer questions after class. However, if I have another class or meeting to attend, I will not always be able to stay. If you cannot meet during my regular office hours, please feel free to send an e-mail to set up an appointment. If you prefer to write an e-mail, you may do so. Please note that I will likely try to respond in person, which I cannot do unless you attend class. As a policy, I will not discuss grades via e-mail.

### **Materials:**

1.) If there is a reading packet for the course, you will receive it at the beginning of the term. You are expected to retain the packet throughout the entire semester. Any additional materials will be distributed in class in advance of their due date. You are responsible for getting copies of materials from classes you missed. Hard copies will be available in the outbox at my office, and will not be e-mailed on an individual basis. Bring every text to every class meeting. While I will announce all readings and assignments in class, reading and homework assignments may not be listed online. If you miss class or forget to write them down, ask one of your fellow students. Do not email me to ask what the assignment is.



2.) You are required to bring paper and a pencil or pen to each class. There will be regular quizzes and short writing assignments to be completed and turned in during the class. Loose leaf or detachable paper is suggested for this purpose. I strongly recommend that notes be taken on paper, and that they are a summary of the main ideas, rather than a direct transcription of everything I say. To this end, I strongly *discourage* taking notes on your computer. This will actually be to your advantage, because we may use symbols, diagrams, and tables, all of which are difficult to format on a computer at the pace we will be proceeding.

3.) The works we will be reading have a long and rich tradition of scholarship. Many, many people have read these texts, and there are no doubt countless study guides and interpretive essays that may be easy to find online. Rather than spending time reading these guides *about* our texts (scholars call these “secondary sources”), you should spend that time re-reading the texts themselves (the “primary sources”). Do not be tempted to plagiarize from these guides-- if you can find it, it is likely that I can find it as well, and this will result in a failing grade (see “academic integrity”). All of my students have the integrity to do their own work. Cheating will not help you to understand the material, but will actually prevent you from learning it. More importantly, whatever ‘points’ you think you might earn from cheating are not worth compromising your integrity. At the end of your life, you probably will not remember or care about the grade you made in this class. You *will* reflect on whether you lived with honesty and integrity.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **Is there any way I can get [THE GRADE YOU WANT] for this class?**

Yes, but first you need to realize that I do not *give* grades. I report on the quality of the work that students do. I will communicate my assessment of your work with you throughout the term by means of comments on your papers, and meetings during office hours. At the end of the term, I give an official report that is recorded on your transcript. Unfortunately I am required to write this report in a form of shorthand that is usually referred to as a “grade”. By doing work of the quality that I expect, you have control over what that report will reflect. Many students begin the term with the assumption that they have an “A” for the class, and that they are then “graded down” whenever they make mistakes. This is false. You begin the term without any grade -- since you haven’t done any work on which I can report. Alternatively, some students have the expectation that if they successfully complete all of the work I expect of them, they will receive an A. This is also false. Remember, the grade is a shorthand. Think of the key for translating it as the following: If you complete all of the work I expect of you on time at an acceptable level, you have earned a C. This is by no means guaranteed to you, but each of you is capable of doing work at this level. If you not only succeed at the assignments, but the quality of your work surpasses the expected requirements, you have done work at the B level. B level work is challenging, and while I would love for all of you to achieve this level (or better), you will need to put in a significant amount of effort to do so. If your work is not only better than acceptable, but *excellent*, your work might be at the A level. Excellence is very difficult to achieve. There is no such thing as someone who “is an A student” -- you will need to push yourself to excel, and then do it again and again. Not everyone will reach this level, and even those who do reach it on one assignment might not do so on the next. Do not lose heart! Excellence is worth striving for.

I would love for these to be the only grades we have to discuss, but I should mention that if your work does not meet the standard of acceptability, you will not earn a C. If the quality of your work is low, or if parts of it are unacceptable, it is at the D level, and if you do not complete your work, or what you submit it is altogether unacceptable, it is an F.

### **...Okay, but I have [YOUR CURRENT GRADE]. Can I still get [GRADE YOU WANT] for the course?**

That depends. As long as you still have work to do, you still have an opportunity to improve. The earlier in the term we are, the more of these opportunities you will have to improve, and the more improvement I will be able to report on when it comes time to report your grades. All of your opportunities are listed under the heading on credit. If you would like suggestions for improvement, feel free to stop by my office. If you wait until the last two or three weeks of the term to do this, you won’t have as much time to take that advice. But I will still be happy to offer suggestions for the future (including the rest of your time at school).

If you find that I have made an error in grading, please let me know as soon as possible. Be prepared to show me the error, and I will happily correct the issue. **However, you should not -- not now, not ever --** request for me or (any of your professors) to give you a better

grade than you have earned for a class. This goes from now until the end of time. It would be unethical for us to do so, and many professors regard such a request to be offensive. But that isn't the worst of it. What would happen if I *were* to change your grade? If I did, your grade would not be something that belonged to you. Like a medal purchased rather than earned, it would be false honor. The integrity of your character is important to me. As your teacher, I would be happier for you to become women and men of great character than the most famous and brilliant philosophers in the world.

**I got [GRADE YOU DON'T LIKE] on [ASSIGNMENT]. Can I get a [GRADE YOU WANT] on the assignment?**

Again, that depends. I will not simply change your grade because you request it. If you feel that a paper you have written for class does not reflect the best work you can do, please meet with me for office hours. With certain stipulations, I reserve the right to accept revised papers on a case-by-case basis. Those stipulations include:

- a. A face-to-face meeting with me to determine the terms of the revision.
- b. Initial on-time completion of the assignment. This is not a makeup assignment or an extension to the original deadline.
- c. Substantial evidence that revision will more closely reflect your other efforts in class (at my discretion). This is not simply a do-over, but a means to more closely reflect other effort that the assignment may have missed.

**I wrote you an e-mail about [TOPIC]. Did you get the e-mail?**

I probably received it. I get lots of e-mails, so I have to prioritize my responses to them, including some to which I cannot or as a matter of policy will not respond. As a rule, I prefer to address individual concerns in person, and reserve e-mail for communicating with groups. If it is possible, I would prefer that we speak briefly after class or in my office. Some students find e-mails to be a lower anxiety form of communication, and if you are one of these, that is fine, and it is acceptable to e-mail me to ask most questions or to initiate a conversation. Face-to-face contact is lower anxiety for me, so I will probably try to respond in person. If you send an e-mail that can be answered in person (or about something that I will only discuss in person), I will approach you after the next class meeting. If you e-mail me but never show up to class, I will assume that you do not need a response, and you should not be surprised when you do not receive one. I am concerned for my students as people with lives outside of my class. As such, if you miss and wish to share the reason with me that is fine, though by no means necessary. It may be helpful if the reason is something such as an illness or emergency which might affect your future performance in class, and I may follow up via e-mail or (more likely) in person to see if everything is okay. I will not e-mail assignments to students on an individual basis. This is firm. I reserve the right to return graded assignments via e-mail, but I will not discuss grades via e-mail (though I am happy to do so in office hours). I will not give progress reports. You have your graded assignments, and you know their relative worth. If you wish to discuss your grades during office hours, please use the signup sheet outside my office. If you have class during those times, you may e-mail me to schedule a meeting for a different time.



**Part II**

**Professional Development**



# Teaching Effectiveness

I have had formal observations from both of the classes I have taught solo. Afterward, the observing faculty member had a conference with me to debrief after the observation. On each occasion, the faculty members remarked on how comfortable I am with silence in the room - in that rather than simply filling in the space with an answer to a question I ask, I am willing to let the students search for it. This is interesting to me because it is in those moments that I was the most profoundly uncomfortable, and the silence came (initially) as a complete accident, and against what I was hoping for. After I received the first comment on this, I have made an effort at two things. First, I try to be more comfortable with waiting while students think through a difficult question. Second I remind myself that it is far less important for me to be comfortable than it is for my students to be well served.

While it is universally the case that we should focus on serving students the best we can, the desired results of this service vary. Throughout my teaching experience, I have been aware of this. Advanced graduate students studying Whitehead have different needs than master's students preparing for an elite Ph.D. program. They in turn have different needs than do college freshmen fulfilling a general education requirement. Even within the introduction to logic course that I taught, a third year philosophy major has different needs than a senior preparing for the LSAT. My occasional discomfort in the classroom is a helpful reminder not only that I must serve all of my students the best that I can, but that I must serve each of them the best that I can. I am able to successfully differentiate my work as a teaching assistant at the Divinity School from that of a solo instructor at Saint Xavier University.

But this is not enough. I am also working to differentiate my teaching for each student. I have had students who are uncomfortable with speaking in groups, or even painfully shy one on one. I am sometimes challenged with the question of how (and how much) to elicit their verbal participation in class. The most striking example involves working with a student who was loathe

to speak in class. It can be obviously stressful with a class of forty students. Even my discussion section of twelve seemed overwhelming. When we would break into partners, she still remained quiet. In our one-on-one conference about her (excellent) paper, she was taciturn. In the oral examinations at the end of the quarter, the professor with whom I was working even remarked on this. When I met with her, she expressed that she never felt the need or desire to speak in any of these settings, and that her aims - what she hoped to get out of the course did not require it. As a graduate student pursuing a terminal Master's degree, she was fine with this, and I decided not to push further. I have different strategies in undergraduate courses, where the students have different needs, one of which involves the fact that they are not yet fully aware of what they need.

I also have students who would be happy to be the only ones to speak. In some ways this challenge is more personal, because I see myself in them. I am always seeking ways to balance the participation of these students with that of the others without silencing them. It is just as unfair to deny vocal students the chance to speak as it is to deny it to the quiet students. It is also unfair to deny the vocal students the opportunity to learn how to listen, or (perhaps the easiest mistake to make) to assume that the quiet students are listening simply because they aren't speaking. Since philosophical thinking places importance on both forms of participation, I have made efforts, when I divide my students into groups, to do so in a way that will facilitate both kinds of participation.

Finally, I am striving to ask questions that result in a healthy silence. Good questions - difficult questions - questions worth considering - the questions asked in the study of philosophy and religion should not admit of quick answers. The problem is that there is also an unhealthy silence - the silence I worry about - that of confusion. My teaching depends on discerning the silence: is it because my students are thinking, or because they are confused? I am constantly working to see that it is the former and not the latter. I use a system of colored index cards that the students pick up at the beginning of each class to check in with my students as often as I can. The chair of my department is beginning to adopt this as well. If I ask a question that results in silence, they use these cards to tell me whether the silence is healthy, and so they need more time to consider the question, or if they are confused by the question. The latter is occasionally the case even with the best teachers I have ever had. What distinguishes them is their ability to detect this, and to re-work the question in a way that challenges rather than confuses their students. By knowing the difference, and seeing the difference, my students are better served, and I can navigate this silence.



# Professional Development

## THE CRAFT OF TEACHING IN THE ACADEMIC STUDY OF RELIGION

### **Dean's Craft of Teaching Seminars:**

Nelson Tabe

David Carrasco

Constance Furey

### **Divinity School Syllabus Workshop** (Lucy Pick, facilitator)

### **Craft of Teaching General Program:**

The Educator as Mentor with Kevin W. Hector & Jeffrey Stout

Teaching at the Graham School with Wendy Donniger

Pedagogy in the Philosophy of Religions with Dan Arnold

Panel Discussion on transitioning to the first years of teaching

Pedagogy Discussion with James T. Robinson

Teaching at Public Research Universities panel discussion

Approaches to Introductory Courses (L. Pick and R. Rosengarten)

## UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO CENTER FOR TEACHING

### **Workshop on Teaching in the College**

### **Preparing Future Faculty Series:**

Seminar on Course Design

Syllabus Design Workshop

Syllabus Workshop

Workshop on Course Design

Individual Teaching Consultation

## CONTINUED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Observation with Molly Sturdivant at Saint Xavier University, Chicago

Observation with Jason Aleksander at Saint Xavier University, Chicago

Observation with Richard Rosengarten at the University of Chicago

Teaching With Fiction with L. Pick and Noah Toly



## Appendix II: Student Evaluation Tallies



**Saint Xavier University**  
**2014 Spring College of Arts and Sciences Course Evaluations**

**Course:** PHIL-210-01-2014S : Logic and Argument

**Instructor:** Jason Cather \*

1 - Expected Grade for the course:										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
A	(1)	7	36.84%					2.05 		
B	(2)	6	31.58%							
C	(3)	4	21.05%							
D	(4)	2	10.53%							
F	(5)	0	0%							
Pass	(6)	0	0%							
NA	(0)	0	0%	0 25 50 75 100				Question		
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
19/27 (70.37%)	2.05	1.03	2.00							

2 - Current Standing:										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Freshman	(1)	0	0%					3.16 		
Sophomore	(2)	5	26.32%							
Junior	(3)	8	42.11%							
Senior	(4)	5	26.32%							
Graduate	(5)	0	0%							
Other	(6)	1	5.26%							
				0 25 50 75 100				Question		
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.16	1.01	3.00							

3 - I am taking this course as a(n):										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Major requirement	(1)	6	31.58%					2.26 		
Minor requirement	(2)	3	15.79%							
Core requirement	(3)	9	47.37%							
Elective Other	(4)	1	5.26%							
				0 25 50 75 100				Question		
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
19/27 (70.37%)	2.26	0.99	3.00							

4 - Provided clear statement of course objectives										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	12	63.16%					3.58 		
Agree	(3)	6	31.58%							
Disagree	(2)	1	5.26%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0 25 50 75 100				Question		
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.58	0.61	4.00							

**Saint Xavier University**  
**2014 Spring College of Arts and Sciences Course Evaluations**

**Course:** PHIL-210-01-2014S : Logic and Argument

**Instructor:** Jason Cather \*

5 - Appeared knowledgeable about the course subject matter										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses					Means	
Strongly Agree	(4)	14	73.68%						3.74	
Agree	(3)	5	26.32%							
Disagree	(2)	0	0%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.74	0.45	4.00							

6 - Was well prepared for class										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses					Means	
Strongly Agree	(4)	15	78.95%						3.79	
Agree	(3)	4	21.05%							
Disagree	(2)	0	0%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.79	0.42	4.00							

7 - Allotted time appropriately to present material										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses					Means	
Strongly Agree	(4)	13	68.42%						3.63	
Agree	(3)	5	26.32%							
Disagree	(2)	1	5.26%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.63	0.60	4.00							

8 - Was open to student questions and encouraged participation										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses					Means	
Strongly Agree	(4)	14	73.68%						3.63	
Agree	(3)	4	21.05%							
Disagree	(2)	0	0%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	1	5.26%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.63	0.76	4.00							

**Saint Xavier University**  
**2014 Spring College of Arts and Sciences Course Evaluations**

**Course:** PHIL-210-01-2014S : Logic and Argument

**Instructor:** Jason Cather \*

9 - Presented material in an interesting and challenging manner										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses					Means	
Strongly Agree	(4)	14	73.68%							
Agree	(3)	3	15.79%							
Disagree	(2)	2	10.53%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.63	0.68	4.00							

10 - Contributed to my understanding of course material										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses					Means	
Strongly Agree	(4)	14	73.68%							
Agree	(3)	4	21.05%							
Disagree	(2)	1	5.26%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.68	0.58	4.00							

11 - Was available for assistance outside of class										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses					Means	
Strongly Agree	(4)	15	78.95%							
Agree	(3)	4	21.05%							
Disagree	(2)	0	0%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.79	0.42	4.00							

12 - Returned assignments and exams within a reasonable time frame										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses					Means	
Strongly Agree	(4)	13	68.42%							
Agree	(3)	5	26.32%							
Disagree	(2)	1	5.26%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.63	0.60	4.00							

**Saint Xavier University**  
**2014 Spring College of Arts and Sciences Course Evaluations**

**Course:** PHIL-210-01-2014S : Logic and Argument

**Instructor:** Jason Cather \*

13 - Provided clear statement of the basis of grading										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	12	63.16%						Question	
Agree	(3)	7	36.84%							
Disagree	(2)	0	0%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100		
Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.63	0.50	4.00							

14 - Provided feedback which stimulated learning										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	13	68.42%						Question	
Agree	(3)	5	26.32%							
Disagree	(2)	1	5.26%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100		
Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.63	0.60	4.00							

15 - I would say this is an effective instructor										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	14	73.68%						Question	
Agree	(3)	4	21.05%							
Disagree	(2)	1	5.26%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100		
Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.68	0.58	4.00							

16 - Increased my knowledge and expertise in the subject matter										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	12	63.16%						Question	
Agree	(3)	6	31.58%							
Disagree	(2)	1	5.26%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100		
Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.58	0.61	4.00							



**Saint Xavier University**  
**2014 Spring College of Arts and Sciences Course Evaluations**

**Course:** PHIL-210-01-2014S : Logic and Argument

**Instructor:** Jason Cather \*

17 - Challenged me to work to my intellectual capacity										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	14	73.68%					3.74		
Agree	(3)	5	26.32%							
Disagree	(2)	0	0%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.74	0.45	4.00							

18 - Instructional materials were helpful in meeting course objectives										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	12	63.16%					3.58		
Agree	(3)	6	31.58%							
Disagree	(2)	1	5.26%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.58	0.61	4.00							

19 - Met objectives as described in syllabus										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	12	63.16%					3.63		
Agree	(3)	7	36.84%							
Disagree	(2)	0	0%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.63	0.50	4.00							

20 - I would say this is an effective course										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	13	68.42%					3.63		
Agree	(3)	5	26.32%							
Disagree	(2)	1	5.26%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
19/27 (70.37%)	3.63	0.60	4.00							

**Saint Xavier University**  
**2014 Spring College of Arts and Sciences Course Evaluations**

**Course:** PHIL-210-01-2014S : Logic and Argument

**Instructor:** Jason Cather \*

**21 - Strengths of the instructor**

Return Rate	11/27 (40.74%)
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- 1) The instructor had a great deal of energy and was passionate about the subject matter. 2) The instructor had a great sense of humor, and although this is not essential for learning/teaching logic, it does really make for a huge pedagogical strength. 3) The instructor showed a genuine interest in the growth of the students and their grasp of the material. He often repeated his willingness to meet outside of class if there were any questions. 4) He brought the class material into dialogue with contemporary issues, which always helps in making the meaning of a class more explicit. 5) He respected our time and showed a keen awareness of his own responsibility as an instructor. 6) He did not hesitate to provoke critical thinking, especially on larger metaphysical questions. 7) Piggybacking on #6, I felt that the instructor did well to uphold the university's Christian identity through example, but in a way that was accessible, unobtrusive, and respectful of others. 8) He showed a great deal of humility when corrected or when he felt stumped himself, but he did this while still retaining his authority in the subject matter. 9) He dressed professionally and addressed his students in a professional and adult fashion. 10) Overall, outstanding job! Honestly, it was a fun class experience.

- Explained everything very well, and was willing to help anyone. Don't know how well I would have done if he didn't teach the class the way he did, very good
- Fun and seemed to really care about his subject. Very open to meeting in his office after class; frequently encouraged students to ask him questions outside of class time.
- Great communication and interpersonal skills.
- he is enthusiastic and knows his subject well. Classes never were boring.
- He is great at explaining some difficult concepts
- He knows his material, but has a hard time explaining it to non-philosophy majors.
- Presented the lessons very well and effectively. I have a better understanding of logic language and good arguments
- Very energetic and prepared.
- Very energetic, kept the class interested in learning about logic. I enjoyed how you taught, it really allowed me to be down to earth and not just be bored in class. Great Job!
- Very interesting and engaging

**22 - Suggested improvements for the instructor**

Return Rate	8/27 (29.63%)
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- I actually have very few suggestions on improvement; I was very impressed at the quality of the instruction, especially as it came from a graduate student. I might offer one small suggestion: There were some moments in the class discussions where he seemed to lose a little of the control. Most of these moments were very well recovered, but the derail would perhaps leave some students feeling slighted when told to bring it up outside of class in "office hours". The distraction from the core topic at hand would sometimes take away from class time as well. Most of these moments happened during the final section of the class when we were discussing informal fallacies. I think it would have been good to emphasize the importance of approaching "hot button" topics with a cool head. This is a skill that would be especially helpful in today's "charged" American political/cultural environment. I felt like the class often became "charged". One good lesson of logic is how one can distance oneself from that emotion and thus look at a problem coolly enough to give it a fair assessment.

- Keep teaching how you do, it really helped me learn a lot and enjoyed the down to earth feel of the class.
- More Assignments on Logi Cola.
- New teacher needs a bit of polish but great instructor.
- none
- none
- the class consist of other students, not just philosophy majors. When he is explaining needs to explain where non-philosophy majors are able to comprehend as well. Felt as if he favors more of the philosophy major students
- This professor has a classroom bias that I can no longer bring myself to ignore. This is a great example of how professors (in particular, philosophy professors) can pay lip-service to the lofty notion of gender equality, but don't realize they practice the opposite in their own work. Example: Feb. 5, I asked a question in class (I am a female student). I was able to ask it, but the professor flatly ignored it. 10 minutes later, a friend of mine (and a male student) asked an identical question (because he thought it was worth answering). The professor immediately 1.)commented on the thoughtful and intelligent nature of the question and 2.)took a considerable amount of time answering the question. This troubles me, because it was not the only instance where this happened, and the professor seems to do it unintentionally. Over the course of the semester, I have sent this professor a total of 10 e-mails (each containing questions about course material). I have received a total of one response from him this semester. There is no excuse for this level of non-response! I have successful working relationships with virtually all of my other professors, and I credit regular communication with the bulk of that success. A professor who cannot bring himself to respond to (or read?) questions from his students is not an effective instructor.

**Saint Xavier University**  
**2014 Spring College of Arts and Sciences Course Evaluations**

**Course:** PHIL-210-01-2014S : Logic and Argument

**Instructor:** Jason Cather \*

23 - Strengths of the course	
Return Rate	6/27 (22.22%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I greatly enjoyed the portions on good and bad arguments and propositional logic.</li> <li>- I was interested in the topic</li> <li>- opened my mind up to look at things in other ways.</li> <li>- The class was presented in an engaging lecture style. The class covered a wide swath of material in a short time frame. It also broke neatly into three sections, which helped keep it organized, with appropriate testing times and breaks. The class often incorporated good contemporary and classical argument examples. The Logicola exercises were very very helpful. Repetition makes the best master of the material. Finally, I enjoyed the few times we did supplemental reading. The excerpt from Aristotle and the discussion on Truth were, I think, very important for the class.</li> <li>- the course was Excellent , however I did not put energy to all the homework.</li> <li>- Very interesting class</li> </ul>	

24 - Suggested improvements for the course	
Return Rate	6/27 (22.22%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- from my point of view the class is good in the way is teaching.</li> <li>- I was actually a little disappointed that we didn't cover more material in Gensler's book. The chapter on "meaning" would have been interesting to breach as well. I think we could have been challenged with more homework. There really wasn't too much outside work required for this class, and I feel that would have been helpful. I also thinking it would have been good to practice more at "translating" arguments from standard English to the logic language.</li> <li>- Keep it the same</li> <li>- Needs to be more simplified. Way too confusing and all over the place a the end of the semester. Book should help students more. Most of the material that the professor taught, students could not reference back for examples</li> <li>- none</li> <li>- powerpoints</li> </ul>	

**Saint Xavier University**  
**2014 Fall College of Arts and Sciences Course Evaluations**

**Course:** PHIL-140-13-2014F : PHIL-140-13-2014F The Examined Life-PHIL-140-13-2014F

**Instructor:** Jason Cather \*

1 - Expected Grade for the course:										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
A	(1)	1	12.5%					2.13		
B	(2)	5	62.5%							
C	(3)	2	25%							
D	(4)	0	0%							
F	(5)	0	0%							
Pass	(6)	0	0%							
NA	(0)	0	0%					Question		
				0	25	50	75	100		
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
8/20 (40%)	2.13	0.64	2.00							

2 - Current Standing:										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Freshman	(1)	8	100%					1.00		
Sophomore	(2)	0	0%							
Junior	(3)	0	0%							
Senior	(4)	0	0%							
Graduate	(5)	0	0%							
Other	(6)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
8/20 (40%)	1.00	0.00	1.00							

3 - I am taking this course as a(n):										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Major requirement	(1)	0	0%					3.13		
Minor requirement	(2)	0	0%							
Core requirement	(3)	7	87.5%							
Elective Other	(4)	1	12.5%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
8/20 (40%)	3.13	0.35	3.00							

4 - Provided clear statement of course objectives										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	5	62.5%					3.63		
Agree	(3)	3	37.5%							
Disagree	(2)	0	0%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
8/20 (40%)	3.63	0.52	4.00							

**Saint Xavier University**  
**2014 Fall College of Arts and Sciences Course Evaluations**

**Course:** PHIL-140-13-2014F : PHIL-140-13-2014F The Examined Life-PHIL-140-13-2014F

**Instructor:** Jason Cather \*

5 - Appeared knowledgeable about the course subject matter										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	5	62.5%					3.63	Question	
Agree	(3)	3	37.5%							
Disagree	(2)	0	0%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100		
Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median							
8/20 (40%)	3.63	0.52	4.00							

6 - Was well prepared for class										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	5	62.5%					3.63	Question	
Agree	(3)	3	37.5%							
Disagree	(2)	0	0%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100		
Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median							
8/20 (40%)	3.63	0.52	4.00							

7 - Allotted time appropriately to present material										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	5	62.5%					3.25	Question	
Agree	(3)	1	12.5%							
Disagree	(2)	1	12.5%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	1	12.5%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100		
Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median							
8/20 (40%)	3.25	1.16	4.00							

8 - Was open to student questions and encouraged participation										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	6	75%					3.63	Question	
Agree	(3)	1	12.5%							
Disagree	(2)	1	12.5%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100		
Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median							
8/20 (40%)	3.63	0.74	4.00							

**Saint Xavier University**  
**2014 Fall College of Arts and Sciences Course Evaluations**

**Course:** PHIL-140-13-2014F : PHIL-140-13-2014F The Examined Life-PHIL-140-13-2014F

**Instructor:** Jason Cather \*

9 - Presented material in an interesting and challenging manner										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	7	87.5%					3.75		
Agree	(3)	0	0%							
Disagree	(2)	1	12.5%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
8/20 (40%)	3.75	0.71	4.00							

10 - Contributed to my understanding of course material										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	5	62.5%					3.63		
Agree	(3)	3	37.5%							
Disagree	(2)	0	0%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
8/20 (40%)	3.63	0.52	4.00							

11 - Was available for assistance outside of class										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	5	62.5%					3.63		
Agree	(3)	3	37.5%							
Disagree	(2)	0	0%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
8/20 (40%)	3.63	0.52	4.00							

12 - Returned assignments and exams within a reasonable time frame										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	3	37.5%					3.00		
Agree	(3)	3	37.5%							
Disagree	(2)	1	12.5%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	1	12.5%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
8/20 (40%)	3.00	1.07	3.00							

**Saint Xavier University**  
**2014 Fall College of Arts and Sciences Course Evaluations**

**Course:** PHIL-140-13-2014F : PHIL-140-13-2014F The Examined Life-PHIL-140-13-2014F

**Instructor:** Jason Cather \*

13 - Provided clear statement of the basis of grading										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	3	37.5%					3.25		
Agree	(3)	4	50%							
Disagree	(2)	1	12.5%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median							
8/20 (40%)	3.25	0.71	3.00							

14 - Provided feedback which stimulated learning										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	4	50%					3.38		
Agree	(3)	3	37.5%							
Disagree	(2)	1	12.5%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median							
8/20 (40%)	3.38	0.74	3.50							

15 - I would say this is an effective instructor										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	5	62.5%					3.50		
Agree	(3)	2	25%							
Disagree	(2)	1	12.5%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median							
8/20 (40%)	3.50	0.76	4.00							

16 - Increased my knowledge and expertise in the subject matter										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	5	62.5%					3.50		
Agree	(3)	2	25%							
Disagree	(2)	1	12.5%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
Return Rate	Mean	STD	Median							
8/20 (40%)	3.50	0.76	4.00							

**Saint Xavier University**  
**2014 Fall College of Arts and Sciences Course Evaluations**

**Course:** PHIL-140-13-2014F : PHIL-140-13-2014F The Examined Life-PHIL-140-13-2014F

**Instructor:** Jason Cather \*

17 - Challenged me to work to my intellectual capacity										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	7	87.5%					3.88		
Agree	(3)	1	12.5%							
Disagree	(2)	0	0%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
8/20 (40%)	3.88	0.35	4.00							

18 - Instructional materials were helpful in meeting course objectives										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	6	75%					3.63		
Agree	(3)	1	12.5%							
Disagree	(2)	1	12.5%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
8/20 (40%)	3.63	0.74	4.00							

19 - Met objectives as described in syllabus										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	6	75%					3.75		
Agree	(3)	2	25%							
Disagree	(2)	0	0%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
8/20 (40%)	3.75	0.46	4.00							

20 - I would say this is an effective course										
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percentage	Percent Responses				Means		
Strongly Agree	(4)	4	50%					3.50		
Agree	(3)	4	50%							
Disagree	(2)	0	0%							
Strongly Disagree	(1)	0	0%							
Not Applicable	(0)	0	0%							
				0	25	50	75	100	Question	
<b>Return Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>							
8/20 (40%)	3.50	0.53	3.50							



**Saint Xavier University**  
**2014 Fall College of Arts and Sciences Course Evaluations**

**Course:** PHIL-140-13-2014F : PHIL-140-13-2014F The Examined Life-PHIL-140-13-2014F

**Instructor:** Jason Cather \*

21 - Strengths of the instructor	
Return Rate	5/20 (25%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- challenging</li> <li>- He had an interesting way of making us think and participate. He definitely knows the material and is a great instructor overall.</li> <li>- He very good at communicating with his students. Makes an effort to help the class understand the text. He wants his students to succeed.</li> <li>- I liked the way the instructor presented the material. He always challenged the class the think in a different way and use questions to solve any problems or misunderstandings.</li> <li>- Very passionate about Philosophy and always kept the discussions interesting</li> </ul>	

22 - Suggested improvements for the instructor	
Return Rate	4/20 (20%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- He was a hard grader, but I liked that he always gave us ways to improve our writing and gave us the chance to do so.</li> <li>- No improvements</li> <li>- none</li> <li>- none</li> </ul>	

23 - Strengths of the course	
Return Rate	5/20 (25%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- insightful</li> <li>- Taught me different views about examining life. Some stuff is just mind blowing.</li> <li>- The structured papers and prompts we had to write during the course</li> <li>- There was never a class were only the instructor spoke, we all were able to participate which made the class really interesting. There was never a boring class.</li> <li>- This course helped me think of life from many different perspective. This course was challenging but benefited me greatly.</li> </ul>	

24 - Suggested improvements for the course	
Return Rate	4/20 (20%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Don't schedule this course at 8 in the morning</li> <li>- I would not suggest anything for this course, it's fine the way it is.</li> <li>- No improvements</li> <li>- none</li> </ul>	



# Appendix III: Individual Teaching Consultation Feedback



## INDIVIDUAL TEACHING CONSULTATION FINAL REPORT

Date: 4 November 2013

Graduate Teacher: Jason Cather

Course: Introduction to the Study of Religion

Consultants: Kate Malecek and Melanie Zeck

Attendance: 11 students

Setting: The classroom is oriented toward two chalkboards and a wide instructor desk. The room is scattered with small student desks, but the students sit in the front in an oblong circle. The instructor also sits in a student desk and only occasionally stands to write on the board.

**Summary:** Jason led an engaging discussion of a philosophical/theological text. He led with a focused consideration of how students phrase their arguments in class and in writing in order to draw attention to how the structure of their arguments affects their interpretation and rigor as a testable, reasoned position. The elements of this discussion came to bear on the way the students analyzed the text and pushed on each other's understanding of it. Jason's discussion style moves quickly but completely through a point. He has a skill for developing engaging prompts for the students, and for leading them to textual evidence. Many students responded well to this and developed more sophisticated positions with his guidance, and showed more enthusiasm for the material in response to his own. Jason started as a leader in the discussion, showing attentiveness to where he wanted the discussion to go, but by the end he seemed fully a participant, active and not necessarily mindful of whether the discussion remained balanced or broadly productive. Jason is certainly capable of leading students to carefully consider a text and advancing their ability to discuss it with clear reasoning. In the future he could work on staying attentive to how well the discussion is incorporating all of the students and speaking to broad themes in addition to detailed arguments.

Observations	Comments/Suggestions
<p><u>Introduction of class</u></p> <p>Jason begins the class somewhat informally, seated and in conversation with students. He starts by introducing two scholarly virtues or attitudes for the students to consider and try to adopt. He then reveals another part of the chalkboard from behind a projector screen that has several sentence intros written on it. These</p>	<p>It is clear from the pre-class banter that the students are very familiar with Jason and that they have clear expectations of this class session. The prepared writing on the board made it easy for Jason to define and focus on these scholarly behaviors and provided a reference point for these ideas throughout the class. This learning goal was well developed in Jason's reflections in preparation for the ITC, and was well executed.</p>

<p>sentences express different ways of introducing an argument and where it comes from: "From my reading" v. "It seems to me." Jason asks the class to consider the effects of each. The students provide some explanations for the strengths or flaws of each construction.</p> <p>It is clear from the discussion that students have opinions about whether or not certain constructions are in fact flawed by being prefaced with opinion. Some students challenged the point with reference to a recent writing assignment and tried to clarify and defend their approaches. Two female students ask whether this attention to argument construction applies only in formal writing, or whether it can be relaxed in interpretative writing or discussion. Jason reiterates his point in conceptual terms: "Getting it right v. being right" "asserting a claim v. taking intellectual ownership."</p>	<p>As a way to improve this exercise, we suggest including more student input to define good and bad scholarly behavior. The students pointed out that as they preface their arguments with a statement that clearly identifies the argument as a function of their own interpretation they, as writers, are thereby clarifying that the forthcoming argument is one that should be evaluated, in turn, by the reader. These students feel that being forthright about subjectivity in these cases is useful. Jason offered rebuttals on these points but not specific examples. If other students provided these rebuttals, it would show that they understand and are convinced by Jason's point more so than if they were to simply hear Jason give his point in conceptual terms again. Perhaps one of the previous readings could be brought back here as an example of how much more deeply it can be discussed when using more careful argument constructions.</p>
<p><u>Discussion of assigned readings</u></p> <p>15 minutes into class, the purpose of this introductory topic in today's discussion is elaborated upon. Jason transitions to the day's reading. Some students shuffle their papers or bring up the reading on their computers. Jason begins by asking for an open summary of the text.</p>	<p>While the structure of the class seems to feel familiar to the students, it would be useful to define and integrate the class topics with earlier and specific introduction of the class agenda. Again, the relevance of attentive arguing for unpacking today's readings could be made more clearly from the start.</p> <p>By placing the class meeting agenda on the board, both the students and the instructor are able to hold each other accountable for covering all of the listed topics. Having an agenda on the board also enables late students to figure out immediately what they have missed and orient themselves in the current discussion.</p>
<p>Jason writes a framework for analyzing the text on the board. He asks students to identify the problem, thesis, argument and implications of the reading.</p>	<p>By outlining this structure on the board, the discussion immediately becomes more focused. At first students led with their impressions, but now they are providing specific arguments with</p>

	<p>text references, responding to each other's ideas critically but positively. This outlining tool helped the students define the elements of the text and address differences in their interpretations of that text. Participation increased once the discussion was given this structure.</p>
<p><u>Critical themes of text are developed</u></p> <p>By thirty minutes into class, the critical philosophical themes of the text have been identified and are now being discussed by a few active students at length. Jason mentions that this exercise will help prep the students for their next formal lecture meeting. Several students are attentive to where their arguments are coming from and how they present evidence.</p>	<p>The framework on the board for unpacking a reading is most helpful when the students carry it all the way through, Problem to Implication. However, this doesn't involve all students. A few active students tend to speak back and forth amongst themselves and then with Jason to develop consensus. It might be helpful to ask students to work in small groups on filling out this framework and then have the small groups report back to the class. This would help involve all students and allow multiple different interpretations to be developed for comparison, rather than using a few students to settle a consensus reading. Jason could ask the different groups to tackle the same concept or he could provide different prompts to each group. Once the small groups have had time to consider their assigned task, the class could reconvene as a whole and usher in a new module in which each group's work is presented, giving fodder for a larger-scale discussion.</p> <p>(Jason described that the normal reading assignment was waived for this class because of the midterm deadline, but this small group discussion could serve in its place to bring out participation without an assignment.)</p> <p>Overall, Jason used this framework tool well to develop the main points of the reading and to examine their implications. Jason could involve more students and increase their motivation in this exercise by also mentioning how practicing their communication skills here is good practice for their final oral exam.</p>
<p><u>Ongoing discussion</u></p> <p>By 45 minutes in, the discussion has become a little more scattered. A few students are most</p>	<p>While the discussion was engaging for a few students, the discussion section seeks to develop communication skills for all of the students – listening for reading understanding</p>

<p>involved in the conversation, and Jason contributes more so as a participant, less so as a facilitator. At this point, about four male members of the class are speaking the most, and three students have yet to speak at all. There are a few instances in which the trajectory of the discussion returns to an instructor-centered mode, in which Jason takes several minutes to illustrate or develop a point. He closes this section with a selected reading and offers an interpretation.</p>	<p>is not enough, the students need to practice conveying a position. It may be that the discussion needs to be more structured in order to incorporate a greater range of student participation. It also is important for the instructor to remain a facilitator if the goal is for students to learn by participating in discussion. It is very easy for students to listen to the instructor at length instead of actively digging into discussion. An exercise that offers all students an opportunity to speak and gives the instructor a clear role as a facilitator would help broaden student participation and make it more independent and meaningful. Moreover, as the instructor becomes more mindful of the student-centered mode of discussion trajectory, he would be cultivating an environment marked by experiential learning, as opposed to an environment that is characterized the passive learning associated with an instructor-center mode. By facilitating the participation of all of the students, and not just a few, the instructor can maintain a more balanced discussion trajectory in general.</p>
<p><u>End of class</u></p> <p>With ten minutes remaining in the class, a previously silent student reacted strongly to the passage that Jason selected to read. The student brought up several contrasting points with text evidence and generated both debate and consensus among his classmates. At one point Jason polls the class and suggests further debate between two students in disagreement. As the class comes to a close, Jason and two to three other students are speaking in turn, while the hands of a few other students are left in the air.</p>	<p>It was great to see this previously silent student perk up at the end of class with such a well-developed counter point. This student's comments showed clearly that he completed the readings with great attention and personal investment in understanding their arguments and implications. It seems likely that this student would have had a great deal to share earlier in the discussion section had he been compelled to speak up, so anything that can encourage this will add to discussion. This final round of discussion garnered a reaction from many students, and the informal poll showed that many had taken the point differently. However, the follow on discussion did not involve as many students as much as it involved Jason. While these moments of contention are exciting for an instructor, it is important to remain a focused facilitator and to let the class carry the discussion more so than the instructor. It is also the responsibility of the instructor to make sure that the class concludes</p>



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
THE CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING  
5845 SOUTH ELLIS AVENUE • CHICAGO, ILLINOIS 60637  
E-MAIL: [TEACHING@COLLEGE.UCHICAGO.EDU](mailto:TEACHING@COLLEGE.UCHICAGO.EDU)  
[HTTP://TEACHING.UCHICAGO.EDU](http://TEACHING.UCHICAGO.EDU)  
TEL: (773) 834-4439 FAX: (773) 834-0493

	<p>instead of just ending when time runs out. After a circuitous hour of discussion, it is important to reiterate the main points and take-away lessons again in order to regain the focus of the class.</p> <p>Whereas the instructor may wish to quickly go over these points, the last few minutes of class also present an excellent opportunity for students to review their notes and double check that they have, indeed, understood the important issues from the class discussion. The first two to three minutes of the next class meeting also present a perfect time for students to revisit the main issues of the previous class. By considering and implementing a narrative arch to the class meetings, the students know how the current topic relates to the previous topic and how both topics are situated within the overall framework of the course with respect to both the learning and content goals.</p>
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## **Appendix IV: Additional Observations**

