

FALL 2009 PHIL 1112 END-OF-SEMESTER EVALUATION SUMMARY

Means calculated from all fourteen completed evaluations.

OVERALL MEAN FOR QUESTIONS 2–33: 2.11 (in the fourth quartile; median score for Fall 2009 instructors of First-Year Writing Seminars is 1.83)

OVERALL MEAN FOR QUESTIONS 20–33: 2.07

Nota bene: The mean for questions 20–33 is more relevant for assessing teaching quality, but I have not been given the median score for instructors for those questions.

INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS:

Question 1) The most important reason I chose this seminar: most students selected: (1) I liked the course description.

For questions 2–5: 1 = An appropriate amount, 2 = Too much, 3 = Too little, 4 = Far too much, 5 = Far too little.

	Mean	Question
2)	1.38	How much reading did you do?
3)	2.00	How much out-of-class writing did you do?
4)	1.31	How much time was spent learning about writing?
5)	1.69	How much time was devoted to learning how to revise your essays?

For questions 6–19: How much do you agree with the following statements? 1 = Very strongly, 2 = Strongly, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = A little, 5 = Not at all.

In class, in conferences, or in paper comments, the teacher emphasized

	Mean	Question
6)	2.15	choosing the words that best express ideas.
7)	2.62	writing grammatically correct sentences.
8)	2.00	structuring sentences carefully.
9)	2.69	providing appropriate documentation for sources.
10)	1.46	developing a strong argument.
11)	2.31	writing well-focused, coherent paragraphs.
12)	3.62	making transitions from one paragraph to the next.
13)	1.85	focusing an essay on a significant problem, hypothesis, thesis, argument, or idea.
14)	2.00	supporting claims with pertinent substantive evidence.
15)	2.54	incorporating and analyzing source material and quotations.
16)	2.69	editing essays to eliminate flaws of grammar, word choice, spelling, and format.
17)	2.15	revising essays to enhance interest, clarity, and persuasiveness.
18)	1.62	writing in a style appropriate for a particular purpose.
19)	2.54	writing in a style appropriate for a particular audience.

For questions 20–33: How much do you agree with the following statements? 1 = Very strongly, 2 = Strongly, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = A little, 5 = Not at all.

In this seminar,

	Mean	Question
20)	2.31	reading and writing assignments formed an understandable progression.
21)	2.77	the level of difficulty of the readings seemed appropriate.
22)	2.15	I learned to read with care in the discipline of the seminar.
23)	2.31	informal/prep. writing assignments helped me understand the readings and write an essay.
24)	1.77	I had opportunities to confer privately with the teacher.
25)	1.54	the teacher was well-prepared.
26)	1.54	the teacher directed discussions well.
27)	1.69	the teacher treated my writing with respect.
28)	2.00	the teacher graded my papers fairly.
29)	2.00	the teacher returned our papers within a reasonable length of time.
30)	2.46	comments on each returned paper helped me improve the next assignment.
31)	1.85	I felt intellectually stimulated.
32)	2.31	I became a more confident writer.
33)	2.31	I became a more skillful writer.

WRITTEN RESPONSES:

All comments are reproduced. Minor errors are corrected without note. I have resisted the urge—very strong in some cases—to comment on these responses.

What were the best aspects of this course? this instructor?

- I learned how to construct a solid argument and write in a more direct style. The instructor explained EVERYTHING with flawless precision. It was remarkable.
- Subject matter and discussion were stimulating. The class was engaging and rarely boring. Instructor made strong effort to frequently include students in classroom discussion and encouraged all students to contribute.
- The in class discussions were my favorite part. Sydney did a great job leading them. Sydney was also really accommodating when I got sick. The only aspect that could be improved is that Sydney could ask the quiet kids more questions so it isn't the same 5 people talking.
- The instructor allowed open discussion. He is also very reasonable and it's easy to talk in class.
- The instructor was consistently well prepared and usually held interesting discussions.
- The best part of the course was discussing the various arguments of different philosophers in class. The instructor always came up with really good circumstances in which our argument would be wrong which enabled us to alter our arguments.
- The discussions were very informative and were led well by the instructor. The workload was high; however, it prepares students for the future.
- Discussions were fun. And interpretations of texts.

- Good in class discussion that really helped to understand the reading materials.
- Well directed discussions; challenging material; helpful and constructive criticism; and availability and willingness to discuss issues.
- Subject material is interesting. Instructor is very logical and good at holding discussions. Also clear at presenting ideas.
- The best aspect of this course was the information we discussed in class. Learning about happiness in our lives and how people aim to achieve it was interesting. Our instructor gave us great tips on what to look for in our reading and the comments on our papers helped to improve my writing.
- Course: good variety of reading; a lot of writing, so many opportunities to practice/learn new styles—felt like we were always writing. Instructor: intelligent; very dedicated to class and involved.

Do you believe your writing has improved? If so, how did the course promote this improvement? Are there aspects of writing we should have stressed more heavily?

- Yes. See beginning of above answer [I learned how to construct a solid argument and write in a more direct style]. The writing exercises and essay feedback promoted this improvement. No.
- I do believe my writing has improved. I believe the two greatest factors that led to the improvement were: (1) the high quantity of essays and analytic reading responses and (2) the comments and critiques the instructor gave on the back of essays.
- My writing has gotten way better, I think. The sheer amount of writing was really helpful as well as Sydney's focus on clarity.
- Yes, I learned a lot about writing philosophy essays and how they differ from typical English essays. Sydney did a good job clarifying the stylistic differences. It was very helpful (i.e., I can use the word "you" and shouldn't have flowery introductions).
- It may have improved marginally. I would have benefitted more from a seminar focused more on writing and less on analyzing philosophical works.
- My writing in the field of philosophy has definitely improved. However, I do not think my traditional writing skills have improved greatly. The course promoted this by the instructor giving criticism to my essays and allowing me to fix them.
- Yes, I do believe that my writing has improved. I learned to write in a more specific way, enabling me to better use sources for essays.
- Yes, now it's less redundant and clunkier, but clearer for the reader. I explicitly state the direction of the essays that I write.
- I don't think so. The writing style we wrote was philosophical style and I don't know when I will need those styles unless I'm in another philosophy class.
- The course forced me to write with greater clarity.

- My writing improved, because this course stressed structure of arguments, which I haven't had much of before.
- Yes, the analytic reading responses got me to think about the readings which helped me with the larger papers we wrote.
- I think my writing did improve. I learned a new style of "philosophical writing" which is simpler and more blunt than the more formal/verbose writing I was taught in high school—which made me a more varied (in terms of skills) writer. Also, I had to interpret difficult texts like those of Aristotle, Aquinas, Mill, Hobbes, which was the biggest challenge/very intellectually stimulating.

Were written comments on papers helpful? If so, why? If not, why not?

- Yes. Illuminated holes in arguments so we could master making the strongest, most complete arguments possible.
- Yes. Gave both stylistic and technical critiques. Made suggestions to improve writing.
- Yes.
- Yes, he helped better my ideas and how concisely I got my point across.
- Yes, for the most part the comments were clear and beneficial to my writing. In some cases they were possibly more related to the philosophy and the instructor's own beliefs than on my writing.
- Yes, because they showed me flaws in my arguments and how to fix them.
- The comments on the papers were helpful. They provided direct feedback, which helped for future drafts.
- Yes, especially the latter essays, where the instructor points out argument flaws so that we can improve.
- Yes, the comments were very specific, pointing out the problems and holes in the arguments.
- Comments were thought-provoking and constructively critical.
- Yes, good responses to the ideas and the rigour of the arguments. Little response to grammar and sentence structure.
- Yes, they helped me pinpoint what was wrong with my writing, which allowed me to improve on each paper by learning from my mistakes.
- On big papers, yes. On our small weekly papers, no—we only got a grade for those. I would have liked comments on those since they took time to write.

How useful were class discussion of the texts we read? of writing?

- Both very useful.
- Often useful in clarifying the author's message and applying the messages to practical situations.
- Discussions were the best part.
- Very useful. I learned a lot about philosophy that I never knew existed.
- They allowed me to better understand the text which enabled me to write more clearly.
- They were useful in enhancing my understanding of the material, and they also showed possible flaws in the arguments we read.
- The discussions always proved to be useful. They helped me better understand the complex texts which were read throughout the course.
- Very.
- The discussions were helpful since most of the readings were confusing and the discussion clarified many things. Also, the discussion had a lot of student's opinion, which made it seem more interesting.
- Class discussions were very helpful in clarifying difficult material from the readings.
- Class discussions were good. I like how little b.s. got past the instructor. He was not good at drawing in everyone, so only a few people talked.
- Discussions were useful because it allowed us to get a better handle on the texts which were often hard to interpret.
- Class discussion was useful when we focused on writing methods/skills ... not engaging when we discussed texts.

After taking this course, what do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses as a writer?

- Strength: creativity in crafting an argument. Weakness: expressing ideas too verbosely.
- Strengths: interpretation and analysis. Weaknesses: verbosity, making sure to stay focused on the subject being addressed.
- Strengths: forming logical arguments. Weaknesses: grammatical mistakes/not rereading my work.
- My greatest strengths are coming up with a thesis and arguing for the thesis. My weaknesses are creative writing skills, sentence structuring, and alternating my word choice.
- I have significantly improved my analytical skills throughout the course.
- Strength: creativity in stringing thoughts. Weakness: testing the final arguments.

- My greatest strength is to present a more strong argument and write analytical responses more clearly. My weakness is the grammar.
- My greatest strength is now the clarity with which I write.
- Strengths: coherent arguments, decent prose. Weaknesses: adding flowery stylistic flairs, *way too slow* at writing!
- My strengths would be my opening arguments. My weakness would be bringing my entire paper together as a whole.
- Strength: able to write effectively and analytically about a given text (can take reading ⇒ ideas ⇒ my own work). Weakness: takes a lot of time to dissect challenging readings by philosophers.