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Reflection on Teaching Feedback
2017 DRAFT

I have received feedback on my teaching style from multiple sources. First, I have feedback from students whom I have taught. I have about thirty student evaluations from a class I guest lectured several times as well as about sixty student evaluations from two classes I taught between 2016-2017. Secondly, I received feedback from a philosophy teacher who has been with SLU for fifteen years and watched me teach four class sessions. Third, I received feedback from my faculty mentor. He watched a video recording of me teaching in 2015, and also observed me teaching my own class in 2017. Fourth, I received feedback from a graduate student in the philosophy department at SLU as a part of a “peer review” session.

I reflected on the student evaluations from the times which I served as a guest lecturer. I noticed a pattern. Almost every student wrote about one particular habit I exhibited during class. Since I did not know the names of the students for which I was guest lecturing, I made up names for them. For example, “Mr. Tardy” (for the student who came to class tardy) and “Ms. Texter” (for the student who was continuously texting in the front row). For example, I would ask: “Does anyone think they know why this is the conclusion Descartes makes? Mr. Tardy, what do you think?”

About fifty percent of the student evaluations from these guest lecturing sessions included a note about how I made up names for the students. Some of the students reported that my doing this ‘kept them alert’ since ‘failing to know their names did not limit me from calling on them to answer a question.’ Students said it ‘kept them on their toes’ and also ‘added some fun’ to the otherwise difficult learning experience. About forty percent of the student evaluations included complaints about this same habit, however. Students said they ‘felt like they were being judged.’ One person wrote that he or she thought I was ‘defining the students by the articles of their clothing.’

Reflecting on this, I think, I should have said something like, “Person wearing a hat” instead of “Mr. Hat.” If I guest lecture again, I will keep in mind that the students don’t want to feel like they are being judged by their articles of clothing, and I will keep in mind that students will enjoy being selected to participate by a random method that means staying alert the entire session. Learning this matters because whoever is distracted during class is not being efficiently taught. It is my job to remove as many distractions as I can from class time. If students feel uncomfortable, they

will not be learning. For my own class, though, I will know the names of the students fairly quickly. I have taught two of my own classes, and this issue never arose.

Yet there is more to learn from this. I learned that students in the same lecture will have varying experiences. Some student will like how I teach while others will not. I learned this through reflecting on the evaluations. While some students paid more attention in class because I could ask them a question at any moment, other students were distracted by it. Some students are shy and prefer not speaking in class while other students will pay more attention and learn better by talking in class. In light of the pattern of the student evaluations, I will be more careful to make sure no student feels uncomfortable during class.

The two teachers reported similar insights. I was not surprised to find patterns in their feedback. How they complimented my teaching style was what they had in common—almost exactly.

Both teachers said I was very clear with the students. For example, I restated student questions before answering them for everyone. I thought that doing this allows other students to see that the question does deserve special attention, and it is my aim to enable students to respect each other's thoughts. The teaching feedback I received complemented this technique but apparently for a different reason. Repeating questions before answering them is good, they told me, because it will catch students who were not paying attention earlier. My faculty mentor did note that it is clear that I teach the students to respect their own ideas and the ideas of their peers.

Both teachers said that they appreciated how I treated the class material. For example, before bullet pointing the main points from a text, I read the primary source aloud. My faculty mentor thought I was showing my students how to respect the text. I will continue to do this in my teaching because I am to teach my students to appreciate historical texts.

The negative feedback I received from a SLU philosophy teacher is the following. His biggest criticism is that I 'over-planned.' He thought I would have done better to have covered less material at a slower pace. What I actually did was cover a lot of material at a fast pace. However the other teacher told me that I planned a nice amount, and suggested that it is always better to have too much than not enough. Reflecting on their almost conflicting feedback, I think I will proceed to plan too much but not rush through any of it. I think I should move through the material at a speed

natural to the students, and simply accept it when Monday's materials bleed into Wednesday. I have now structured my syllabus without course dates. I think that this will allow me to move at whatever speed is natural. We will begin with the first task and just move through the material until the semester ends.

Yet I learned something else, too. Reflecting on this feedback, I also learned that teachers (even at the same school) will often disagree on what to teach, and how to teach it. I learned this by comparing the pointers that I was given by my faculty mentor and the second teacher observer.

I think now that there is no "right way" to teach something, even if there are better and worse ways. I am setting the goal to find my own unique path in education, I want to find my natural teaching style and learn the skills to bolster that style so I can teach my students effectively and comfortably.

I'm currently reflecting on how exactly to find my natural teaching style. I think this should start by learning about my students and how they learn, then adapting my teaching style to their learning style. It seems natural to me to incorporate their learning styles when establishing my teaching style. But each student is different and the class averages will also vary. So I don't know how to plausibly do this. More experience teaching and receiving more feedback, I think, is how to settle this matter.