

Teaching Dossier

Russ McBride

Summary of teaching experience

College of Alameda (1995 - 1999), primary instructor:

*Introductory logic

Introduction to philosophy

Laney College (1996 - 1999), primary instructor:

Introduction to philosophy

U.C. Berkeley, teaching assistant:

Philosophy of mind (under John Searle, 1998)

*Philosophy of science (under Thomas Ryckman, 1999)

Introductory logic (under Paolo Mancosu, 2000)

Cognitive science (under Bill Prinzmetal, Dept. of Psychology, 2006)

*The Nature of Mind (under John Campbell, 2006)

*Linguistics and cognitive science (under Geoge Lakoff, Dept. of Linguistics, 2007)

SupInfo University (San Francisco, 2008-2011), primary instructor:

Artificial Intelligence

Class marked with an asterisk above are described in more detail below. Note that U.C. Berkeley uses the term 'Graduate Student Instructor' (GSI) where most other universities use the term 'Teaching Assistant' (TA).

Introductory Logic, primary instructor

College of Alameda: spring 1995, fall 1995, spring 2006, fall 2006, spring 2007, fall 2007, fall 2008, spring 2009.

Description--

The goal: To grapple with the question: "What is good reasoning?"

This question can be viewed as part of the more general philosophical topic of uncertainty, broadly construed, the topic about how best to deal with the unknown. The only claims assuredly certain are also the least helpful: "Green grass is green;" "The store will be open if the store is open;" "All bachelors are bachelors." Everything else is less certain. One way of attempting to gain control of the unwieldy quagmire of uncertainty is by searching for general methods that seem, somehow, to support the truth of some claims over others. The search for these methods is the study of logic. Battling the unknown in an attempt to free a bit of knowledge from its grasp can be a frustrating pursuit. But it is occasionally offset by the rewarding, genuine feeling of "a-ha" that can only rise to its fullest when you know that you've made progress in a study as challenging as logic. We will start by examining the informal fallacies before immersing ourselves in sentential logic and quantificational logic.

Texts--

Copi and Cohen's *Introduction to Logic*

S. Morris Engel's *With Good Reason: An Introduction to Informal Fallacies*

John Nolt's *Logics*

Evaluations--

82% of the students were taking the class to satisfy a mandatory requirement.

Student comments are not collected at Alameda College or Laney College.

Questions ranked on a scale from 1 - 5

<u>Question</u>	<u>Average</u>
Organization of the course:	4.3
Knowledge of the subject matter:	4.7
Presentation and explanation of the subject matter:	4.2
Appropriateness of tests and/or assignments:	4.3
Fairness in treatment of students:	4.6
Motivation and inspiration:	3.9
Explanation of course requirements and grading policy:	4.5
Preparation for each class:	4.3
Attention to student work:	4.0
Classroom atmosphere:	4.4
Class participation:	4.5
Overall estimate of the instructor:	4.1

Philosophy of Science, graduate student instructor under Thomas Ryckman

U.C. Berkeley, fall 1999.

Description--

This course provides an introduction to topics in the philosophy of science with a focus on the understanding of space beginning with Aristotle and Galileo, the debate between Newton and Leibniz, and Einstein's work as a response. We will conclude with Kuhn.

Texts--

A reader consisting of primary sources from:

Aristotle's *Physics*, books I-IV and VIII

Galileo's *Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems*

Newton's *On Gravity and Equilibrium of Fluids*

Newton's *Pilosophiae Naturalis Principia Mthematica*

The Leibniz-Clarke correspondences

Euler's "Argument for the reality of space"

Berkeley's *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*

Mach's *The Science of Mechanics*

Geroch's *General Relativity: A to B*

Feyerabend's *Against Method*

Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

Fritsch's *The Equation that Changed the World*

Evaluations--

Most of the students were taking the class for a breadth requirement.

Questions ranked on a scale from 1 - 7

<u>Question</u>	<u>Average</u>
How well organized were sections?	6.3
How clear was your teaching assistant?	6.1
How well did your teaching assistant stimulate and hold class interest?	6.4
How responsive was your teaching assistant to questions and comments?	6.6
To what extent did the teaching assistant encourage students to participate in class?	5.6
How intellectually rewarding did you find sections?	6.0
How helpful were the teaching assistant's comments on your written work?	6.2
How would you rate the overall effectiveness of your teaching assistant?	6.6

Student comments--

"The best GSI I have had @ Berkeley."

"Class discussions were probably the most helpful of sections I have had at UCB."

"The best possible philosophy TA I've ever had!!"

"Russ is entirely approachable and intelligent. He can answer just about any question in an intelligent and non-condescending manner."

"Russ was a great GSI b/c not only did he put a lot of effort into the class, but he was also one of the most approachable GSI's I've had. You can tell he's excited about the subject."

"On numerous occasions Russ went out of his way to research for us topics of great difficulty. He genuinely cared about our understanding of the basics of the course material. His discussions were laid back, understandable, and entertaining."

"My section experience was great."

"His notes were extremely helpful in writing papers. His explanations of lecture were my only way of understanding it."

"Russ, aside from being the absolute funniest T.A. was also very organized + clear in his style of teaching."

"Russ was well prepared to lead all discussions and presented material well."

"Our GSI planted seeds of subtle humor that release the stress related to studying philosophy."

"Class discussions were probably the most helpful I have had at UCB."

"I would not change Russ."

The Nature of Mind, graduate student instructor under Prof. John Campbell

U.C. Berkeley, Spring 2007

Description--

In this introductory course we will be looking at the relation of psychological states, such as desires or memories, to the physical world. There are five sections in the course: Foundations (Dualism, Behaviorism and Central-State Materialism), Functionalism, Consciousness, Intentionality, and Personal Identity. What is the mind? Are mental states, such as beliefs and desires, memories and hopes, characteristics of a non-physical substance, or are they configurations of the physical world? And if we think that mental states are entirely physical, should we think of them as relating to the ways in which a person tends to behave, or are they rather states of the person's brain? Can a mental state be explained by its potential for causal relations with other mental states and with behavior? What is the relation between conscious experience and the brain? Is consciousness something over and above the ordinary biological functioning of the brain, or can it somehow be explained in biological terms? How can we explain our ability to think about the world? What is a person? These questions will be explored in the course of beginning to understand the nature of the mind.

Texts--

Chalmers' *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*

Evaluations--

Most of the students were taking the class for a breadth requirement.

Questions ranked on a scale from 1 - 7

<u>Question</u>	<u>Average</u>
How well organized were sections?	5.6
How clearly did you GSI communicate philosophical concepts and issues?	6.2
To what extent did the GSI illustrate philosophical ideas with examples, diagrams, etc.?	6.0
How responsive was your GSI to questions and comments in section?	6.1
To what extent did the GSI stimulate discussion among students?	4.8
How intellectually rewarding did you find sections?	5.0
How approachable was your GSI outside of section?	6.2
How substantive and helpful did you find your GSI's comments on your written work?	5.8
How would you rate the overall effectiveness of your GSI?	6.0

Student comments--

“Russ exemplified all the the listed qualities--without his knowledge and help the class and material would have been perfectly incomprehensible.”

“Russ was very helpful as a GSI. He knew the material and was responsible to student questions. GREAT!”

“Russ was very familiar with the material & gave extremely clear explanations. He was amazing for making connecions and clarifications of the readings.”

“Russ did all this and more, definitely the most prepared GSI that I have had as of yet.”

“Russ made the sections casual and informal which aided in encouraging us to participate in class discussion. He wrote lots on the board and gave good examples Everything was helpful in section.”

The Challenge of Cognitive Science to Western Philosophy, graduate student instructor under Prof. George Lakoff

U.C. Berkeley, Spring 2006

Description--

This course will cover three recent discoveries and engage students in some ongoing research in cognitive science.

Discovery 1: There are major results in cognitive science that are inconsistent with much of Western Philosophy. They are: the embodiment of mind, the cognitive unconscious, and such mechanisms of mind as frames, prototypes, image-schemas, metaphorical thought, and conceptual blends. This has required a rethinking of what philosophy is, and what basic philosophical concepts are, especially the concepts of time, events, causation, the mind, the self, and morality.

Discovery 2: Philosophical theories appear to take certain commonplace conceptual metaphors as literally true, and then work precisely through the implications of those metaphors. We will review the central metaphors behind the thought of such philosophers as the Presocratics, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, and certain Anglo-American philosophers.

Discovery 3: The basic results of cognitive science have now been applied to morality and politics, and have given a new and deeper understanding of both of those areas. We will discuss how traditional philosophy has entered into contemporary political thought and what the new discoveries mean for politics, as well as for political philosophy.

Texts--

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Philosophy in the Flesh*

George Lakoff's *Moral Politics*

George Lakoff's *Whose Freedom?*

Evaluations--

Questions ranked on a scale from 1 - 7

<u>Question</u>	<u>Average</u>
How well organized were sections?	5.0
How clearly did you GSI communicate philosophical concepts and issues?	6.3
To what extent did the GSI illustrate philosophical ideas with examples, diagrams, etc.?	6.7
How responsive was your GSI to questions and comments in section?	6.8
To what extent did the GSI stimulate discussion among students?	6.6
How intellectually rewarding did you find sections?	6.3
How approachable was your GSI outside of section?	6.2
How substantive and helpful did you find your GSI's comments on your written work?	4.8
How would you rate the overall effectiveness of your GSI?	6.2

Student comments--

"He did a great job."

“Russ able to address questions from a multiplicity of disciplines, including philosophy, Cog. Sci., psychology, + neuroscience. Very knowledgeable.”

“Russ is a great GSI.”