

## Teaching Evaluations

Paul Linden-Retek

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## Teaching Evaluation Selected Highlights

Paul Linden-Retek

“Paul made this class come to life for me. He is organized, thoughtful, entertaining, and, most importantly, encouraging. I honestly can’t imagine my experience in this course without such a wonderful Teaching Fellow. He made the learning fun while pushing us individually to fully understand various concepts.”

“Paul was an incredible Teaching Fellow. His comments on my weekly questions and portfolios were so helpful; they allowed me to improve my writing and revise my final essay significantly. His sections were all very engaging. I really benefitted from the way he encouraged us to get deeper in our analysis of the text.”

“I cannot emphasize how wonderful Paul was as a TF. First of all, he is incredibly knowledgeable, but also not intimidating, and made the section a comfortable space for anyone and everyone to participate. When discussion got off topic, he tied it back to the readings we were doing. Also, he was very receptive to his midterm feedback, and started implementing weekly guiding questions to prepare for section to make sure we could have a fruitful discussion (while this added some work to the course, it was extremely informal and well worth it in my opinion). Above all, Paul’s accessibility outside of class was amazing and tailored to our schedules, and he gave off the impression that he could advise on anything related to the course, other political philosophy and political theory, graduate school, and law school. I know his comments on my writing definitely helped me improve over the course of the semester.”

“Paul was fantastic. Knowledgeable, understanding and brilliant at explaining things and making it seem that what we were learning actually mattered.”

“Paul is THE MOST talented and amazing TA I have ever had during my time at Yale. He could have taught the entire course spectacularly. His grasp on the material and his insight into which questions most need grappling with was beyond any other instructor at Yale. I loved this class because of his teaching and looked forward to attending section every week. Moreover, he was very considerate regarding the classroom dynamic and made the section a comfortable space to speak in, and would give opportunities for the quieter members to speak (it was nice especially when he would praise someone’s reading response, especially if that person was shyer in section. I thought that was very considerate and helpful for the section to feel like more of a community.) This has honestly been the only section at Yale I felt was actually productive for my learning – e.g. you’re not just there for participation points and to prove that you’ve done the readings, rather, you’re there because the issues are important and Paul can help guide you through thinking through them in a complex way. Paul also gave very thoughtful and deep feedback on the midterm papers, which I felt exceeded the quality of most comments I have gotten from either professors or TAs throughout my time at Yale.”

“Paul is an amazing TF. He really pushed the students in our section to think constantly about the theory behind our discussions and I think our understanding and takeaways from this class benefitted from his leadership. He always made himself available to meet with students before papers and I really feel like my participation in his section was just as important to my experience of this course as the lectures themselves. He does a particularly good job of making sure that students speak fairly equally in section, which I appreciated.”

“Paul is by far the most excellent TF I have ever had. ... He was more like an interesting scholar of the subject, rather than merely a grad student or TF. The questions he posed during section always moved me to [t]hink more deeply and seriously about the issues at hand, and he would continuously take student responses and elevate them by asking more nuanced questions or commentary in response. He was excellent at facilitating conversation and deeply enthusiastic about the material. His feedback on assignments was also always meaningful and pushed us to think more deeply or explore angles we may not have considered. He introduced a high level of analysis into what may have otherwise been a survey course and also made section into a highly intellectual discussion.”

**Course information:**

For this course I taught two discussion sections, with a total enrollment of 22 students. The course was an intermediate-level undergraduate course demanding a significant amount of reading and a substantial final research project. This entailed a willingness to engage in difficult texts in ancient and modern political thought, histories of human rights institutions, and various legal documents drawn from international and regional courts, human rights reporting, and advocacy organizations.

This class aimed to familiarize students with the core ideas, issues, practices and controversies regarding human rights. In doing so, its objective was more to map the terrain that human rights (and the study thereof) occupy, rather than (merely) to justify the concept's existence. Accordingly, the approach of the class is to consider the different ways 'Human Rights' can be thought: as a philosophical construct, as a legal instrument, as a political tool, as an approach to address economic/equity issues, as a social agenda, and as a site of contestation and legitimation. By thinking of human rights' in different ways, the course explored how changes within ideas, norms and practices involving human rights arise and are challenged and/or instantiated, whether in rhetoric, in law, in political regimes, by social movements, etc.

My goals for the course were to help students understand, evaluate, and discuss the course's key theoretical and legal concepts, situated in the historical context that made these debates philosophically and politically urgent. Through section, writing assignments, group work, and oral presentations, students developed their skills in close-reading, analytical and argumentative writing, oral presentation and structured discussion. Students were assessed in two papers during the term, which successively increased in length and complexity; they were also required to do one in-class presentation on a text of their choosing.

The course also served as the gateway to the Multidisciplinary Academic Program in Human Rights at Yale College.

*Total number of students in both sections: 22*

*Total number of students completing evaluation: 15*

*Total number of responses shown here: 15*

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**Evaluation Question:** Summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the Teaching Fellow. In what ways was their teaching effective and in what ways could their teaching be improved?

**Response 1:**

Paul was great at facilitating discussion in sections. He was understanding but also not afraid to probe us further in our ideas and thoughts. Very willing to help outside of section too and discuss topics that interested us.

**Response 2:**

Paul was a great TF. He was very knowledgeable about the issues and allowed us to come to our own conclusions. He steered the conversation into a very fertile territory and made everybody feel comfortable offering their viewpoint.

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**Response 3:**

Paul is the absolute best. He is helpful and knowledgeable and section was actually enjoyable. If you take this class, have him as your TA!

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**Response 4:**

Paul is THE MOST talented and amazing TA I have every had during my time at Yale. He could have taught the entire course spectacularly. His grasp on the material and his insight into which questions most need grappling with was beyond any other instructor at Yale. I loved this class because of his teaching and looked forward to attending section every week. Moreover, he was very considerate regarding the classroom dynamic and made the section a comfortable space to speak in, and would give opportunities for the quieter members to speak (it was nice especially when he would praise someone's reading response, especially if that person was shy in section. I thought that was very considerate and helpful for the section to feel like more of a community.) This has honestly been the only section at Yale I felt was actually productive for my learning -- e.g. you're not just there for participation points and to prove that you've done the readings, rather, you're there because the issues are important and Paul can help guide you through thinking through them in a complex way. Paul also gave very thoughtful and deep feedback on the midterm papers, which I felt exceeded the quality of most comments I have gotten from either professors or TAs throughout my time at Yale.

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**Response 5:**

Paul literally only has strengths as a TA. Lecture was interesting, but I think the heart of my learning came from being in section. He's brilliant, and was an excellent discussion leader. He always challenged students to think more critically about the readings, and was really attentive to what students were saying. If there was anything that I would maybe ask him to tone down a bit is how much he talks--he could sometimes go off on a point--but honestly everything he said was always really informative. If it's possible, having Paul teach an iteration of this course in seminar style would be incredible.

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**Response 6:**

Absolutely incredible. Best instructor (professor or TA) I had this semester.

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**Response 7:**

Paul is an amazing TF. He really pushed the students in our section to think constantly about the theory behind our discussions and I think our understanding and takeaways from this class benefitted from his leadership. He always made himself available to meet with students before papers and I really feel like my participation in his section was just as important to my experience of this course as the lectures themselves. He does a particularly good job of making sure that students speak fairly equally in section, which I appreciated.

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**Response 8:**

Paul is by far the most excellent TF I have ever had. At times he was more knowledgeable and insightful than either of the professors. He was more like an interesting scholar of the subject, rather than merely a grad student or TF. The questions he posed during section always moved me to think more deeply and seriously about the issues at hand, and he would continuously take student responses and elevate them by asking more nuanced questions or commentary in response. He was excellent at facilitating conversation and deeply enthusiastic about the material. His feedback on assignments was also always meaningful and pushed us to think more deeply or explore angles we may not have considered. He introduced a high level of analysis into what may have otherwise been a survey course and also made section into a highly intellectual discussion.

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**Response 9:**

Paul was an absolutely amazing TA. I feel like I get the most out of section every week because of how thoroughly we go through the concepts we go through. The feedback he provides on assignments are also extremely helpful.

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**Response 10:**

Paul is a good guy and he's obviously very knowledgeable and experienced with the topic. However, I really didn't enjoy section, which is unfortunate because I think it had the potential to be very interesting. I just felt that it was just too much about bouncing theoretical ideas off one another and somehow in all of that not managing to discuss human rights in practice.

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**Response 11:**

Paul is an excellent TA and a very good discussion-leader who seems to care about his students and pays attention to every student's comment during section discussion. He's also very accommodating and is overall a very good TA. The only weakness I would point out is that he grades his exams very harshly because he seems to have very high expectations for our short essays.

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**Response 12:**

Paul was great. He was really good at facilitating discussions. He was super available and supportive.

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**Response 13:**

Paul was amazing!!! He engaged with students really deeply, and always made himself available to students. You could tell he cared a lot about the subject and about the opinions of students. He gave thoughtful feedback. Overall, really great! He should be a teacher here. One thing I think would help improve section is if we made it slightly more like an actual discussion between the students. I think it could be more effective to get rid of raising hands and instead have open conversations.

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**Response 14:**

Incredibly passionate and intellectual and very accessible

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**Response 15:**

The best TA I have had to date. He facilitates conversations as well as he leads them which is rare.

**Course information:**

For this course I taught two discussion sections, with a total enrollment of 20 students. The course was an introductory-level lecture course for undergraduates in the field of public international law. In this course I aimed to expose students to the basic concepts and status of international law in several areas: human rights, international criminal law, humanitarian law, use of force, and environmental law. Students learned the structure of the basic documents of international law and international organizations and considered key cases in each area.

Through structured discussion of the readings and cases, students were introduced to central concepts and ideas, and encouraged to develop the critical and analytical skills to compare, critique, and deploy them in writing and discussion. Students were assessed in an in-class midterm exam and a final exam. I also required each student to write short (1-2 paragraph) weekly reading responses, as well as two 750-word position papers over the course of the semester.

*Total number of students in both sections: 20*

*Total number of students completing evaluation: 16*

*Total number of responses shown here: 16*

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**Evaluation question:** Was the relationship between the section (if any) and the course effective, and how could it be improved? What are the strengths and weaknesses of your teaching assistant (discussion section leader, lab section leader, grader or other assistant) as an instructor, and how might his/her teaching be improved?

**Response 1:**

Paul is amazing and furthered my understanding of course concepts. Section was small, intimate, yet never intimidating. I also appreciated the social side of the TF/student relationship I had with Paul. I will miss seeing him thrice weekly. He is indeed a good instructor, as some sections were more than discussions. Those were engaging and thoughtful mini-lectures with appropriate levels of student participation.

**Response 2:**

Paul is an amazing TF. He clarified all my questions and made more difficult topics easier to understand. His friendly attitude made him easy to approach and engage with in conversation.

**Response 3:**

Paul was the shit. He was a p dope TA and I really recommend him.

**Response 4:**

Can't say enough good things about Paul. Really good TF, really good guy. Sections were an absolutely necessary supplement to lectures, and honestly I really enjoyed going to them. (Like, wouldn't have minded if they were every week. Really. That discussion aspect was so helpful, and, uh, kinda fun?)

**Response 5:**

In my opinion, Paul was one of the few good parts about this class. He was incredibly professional and knowledgeable about almost everything that we learned and often brought outside information into sections to enhance the material that Professor Sanchez gave us in lecture. I sometimes felt that sections were unnecessary, as we didn't really do a lot in them, but I don't think that that was his fault; rather, I found it to be a flaw of the class at large.

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**Response 6:**

Paul is the best!!! Wonderful discussion leader and helped break down dense material.

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**Response 7:**

The section was very beneficial for the course. Paul is a great TA and consistently added rich and meaningful material to lecture and textbook material.

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**Response 8:**

Paul was a GREAT TA. He was very understanding and helpful and made sure to clarify any questions we had. He was also very energetic. His sections were always enjoyable.

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**Response 9:**

The section was very helpful! Paul was absolutely wonderful and the best thing about this class. When he becomes a professor one day, his students will be very lucky!

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**Response 10:**

Very satisfied!

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**Response 11:**

Paul was fantastic. Knowledgeable, understanding and brilliant at explaining things and making it seem that what we were learning actually mattered.

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**Response 12:**

Obsessed with him from afar. To an unhealthy degree. Pick him.

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**Response 13:**

Paul was a fantastic teaching fellow. He really knew the material, was extremely good at explaining in section and bringing up new ways to connect what we had learned to current events.

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**Response 14:**

Interesting section discussions and Paul is a great TF!

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**Response 15:**

Great! SO knowledgeable about everything, but not at all patronizing, and really willing to help us out. Led section really well and looked at the problems in interesting ways.

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**Response 16:**

Great TF. Good at explaining.

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**Course information:**

For this course I taught one section with a total enrollment of 7 students. The section was designated 'writing intensive', which entails that enrollment is capped and that instruction focus specifically on developing students' writing skills.

The course was an introductory-level course considering fundamental questions of political philosophy: What is the best way for a person to live, and what is the best way for people to live together? My main goal for the course was to help students understand, analyze, and apply different theoretical accounts of authority, scientific progress, political efficacy, impersonal state institutions, and democratic equality. The course approached these with the help of classic texts in the history of western political thought.

A crucial aspect of this process was working with students to develop their skills as readers, writers, and researchers. Moving together through the research, drafting, and revising process of three 5-page short essays and then a final 10-page paper on topics of their choosing, students learned to compare, critique, and deploy the theoretical debates we studied in the course. Students were also responsible for weekly reading responses (1-2 pages) posted to an online forum, one short (3-4 pages) final reflective essay, and a final exam.

*Total number of students in WR section: 7*

*Total number of students completing evaluation: 7*

*Total number of responses shown here: 7*

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**Evaluation question:** Was the relationship between the section (if any) and the course effective, and how could it be improved? What are the strengths and weaknesses of your teaching assistant (discussion section leader, lab section leader, grader or other assistant) as an instructor, and how might his/her teaching be improved?

**Response 1:**

Paul was able to always offer a lot of help throughout the writing process and really wanted to engage his students with the material. He did have section go long fairly consistently though and assigned work that was not in the syllabus.

**Response 2:**

Good. Very nice and willing to help. A bit unclear about grading and what was expected on writing assignments.

**Response 3:**

Really committed. I learned just as much in section as lecture, and really enjoyed it each week. He gave informative feedback on my writing each week which helped phenomenally.

**Response 4:**

Paul was an incredible Teaching Fellow. His comments on my weekly questions and portfolios were so helpful; they allowed me to improve my writing and revise my final essay significantly. His sections were all very engaging. I really benefitted from the way he encouraged us to get deeper in our analysis of the text.

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**Response 5:**

I cannot emphasize how wonderful Paul was as a TF. First of all, he is incredibly knowledgeable, but also not intimidating, and made the section a comfortable space for anyone and everyone to participate. When discussion got off topic, he tied it back to the readings we were doing. Also, he was very receptive to his midterm feedback, and started implementing weekly guiding questions to prepare for section to make sure we could have a fruitful discussion (while this added some work to the course, it was extremely informal and well worth it in my opinion). Above all, Paul's accessibility outside of class was amazing and tailored to our schedules, and he gave of the impression that he could advise on anything related to the course, other political philosophy and political theory, graduate school, and law school. I know his comments on my writing definitely helped me improve over the course of the semester.

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**Response 6:**

Paul was objectively great, honestly. He really did a good job at letting the students really gear the discussion and lead the conversation, which made section all the more worthwhile and interesting. Outside of section, Paul really proved to be an accessible resource, taking phone calls and meeting outside of his designated office hours. Meeting with him pretty consistently really changed my thoughts on the course from a more negative one to one that was very much positive at the end of the semester, and it ultimately made me a more confident and overall better writer.

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**Response 7:**

My teaching fellow (Paul Linden-Retek) is amazing and I would highly recommend any fellow student taking the class to sign up for his section should he be teaching the class next semester. With that being said, I think the experience one has in section is very much dependent on the style the TA teaches. Personally, I learned a lot from section because I found it hard to ask deep involving questions during lecture and found the small intimate setting of the section to be the perfect place to clear up aspects of the course that I was confused about.

**Course information:**

For this course I taught one section with a total enrollment of 10 students. The section was designated 'writing intensive', which entails that enrollment is capped and that instruction focus specifically on developing students' writing skills.

The course was an introductory-level undergraduate course geared mostly toward freshmen as a survey of the major political theories of the Enlightenment, classical and contemporary formulations of anti-Enlightenment thought, and the nature of, and justifications for, democratic politics in relation to both.

My goals for the course were to introduce students to different styles and traditions of political argument (from utilitarianism to Marxism to democratic theory), to locate each in historical context, and to help students develop the skills to analyze, evaluate, and apply these arguments to contemporary politics. One of the challenges of this course was facing, and developing strategies for dealing with, student apathy and unpreparedness. As my first experience teaching an introductory survey course, the semester was a helpful learning process in developing systems of accountability with my students. I guided students through multiple drafts of two analytical papers during the term. In addition, they were assessed in one in-class final exam, two class presentations on texts of their choosing, along with two short, 750-word critical review essays.

*Total number of students in WR section: 10*

*Total number of students completing evaluation: 5*

*Total number of responses shown here: 5*

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**Evaluation Question:** Was the relationship between the section (if any) and the course effective, and how could it be improved? What are the strengths and weaknesses of your teaching assistant (discussion section leader, lab section leader, grader or other assistant) as an instructor, and how might his/her teaching be improved?

**Response 1:**

Paul made this class come to life for me. He is organized, thoughtful, entertaining, and, most importantly, encouraging. I honestly can't imagine my experience in this course without such a wonderful Teaching Fellow. He made the learning fun while pushing us individually to fully understand various concepts.

**Response 2:**

Paul led very helpful discussion sections and gave excellent guidance to students when they were writing their papers.

**Response 3:**

Paul was very accessible as a TA, and was always willing to answer questions in class and give supplementary feedback on our essays. My main complaint about section is that it did not give us time to discuss the text with our peers. Sections were simply supplementary lectures. For me, philosophy is something that only really comes alive when you get to talk about it--sections did not unfortunately give us the time to do this.

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**Response 4:**

Paul is a thoughtful and helpful individual. He provided extensive feedback. He was the ideal teaching fellow.

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**Response 5:**

The section was basically always very helpful in understanding the material. I wasn't a huge fan of when Paul showed us an essay draft written by a student in the class as an example (being so blatantly compared to him made me feel very bad about myself), and I felt that there was one section that we discussed Rawls when we should've been discussing Nozick. Overall, though, Paul was the BEST. He was so helpful, kind, and excited to share his knowledge. He made himself very accessible, and he was always a wonderful presence to have there. Section was humorous and invigorating, even though we often ran way over time. Big fan of PLR, though! Thanks, Paul!