

Summary: My teaching experience at UCLA must be divided into two sets: Traditional courses for which I was a teaching assistant, which involved regular sections with a group of students in weekly meetings; and the Political Science 195 course, taught through the Center for Community Learning (CCL), in which students had an off-campus internship, wrote weekly essays and a research paper, and met with me one-on-one.

In my tenure at UCLA I was a teaching assistant for four traditional courses: PS 10: Introduction to Political Theory; PS 50: Introduction to Comparative Politics; PS 112A: Democratic Theory; and PS 115C: Citizenship and Public Service. I taught the PS195 course for 20 successive quarters (with one quarter off), including summers.

Below I present summaries of evaluations from these courses, along with sample comments. For the traditional courses, UCLA has students evaluate their TA separately from the faculty member. Each item on the form is scored on a 9-point scale, with 1 “low” and 9 “high”. I provide the mean and median of the responses to the question regarding the “overall rating” of the TA. My average scores were generally fairly close to the averages for TAs in Political Science and across the university as a whole. In some ways this is remarkable, because I tended to ask more of my students than did other TAs. For example, I generally assigned students additional work beyond what was required by the instructor. Some students appreciated this as it helped them explore the material more deeply, but others did not.

For PS195, the summary of evaluations is a bit more difficult: Evaluation summaries were not provided for TAs until the Fall 2005 quarter, and the evaluation form changed over time, ultimately coming to resemble the standard TA evaluation form with the Winter 2009 quarter (although in the quarter before that students completed the standard TA evaluation form used for traditional classes). Further, the evaluations were primarily geared toward evaluating the course and course content, rather than the TA, and until Winter 2009 there was no “overall rating” category for the TA. As a result, for evaluations prior to Winter 2009, I provide average responses for the two questions that are most relevant to teaching and that were consistent each quarter. Questions on these evaluations were scored on a 4-point scale, from “strongly agree” (4) to “strongly disagree” (1). Because these evaluations did not use the standard format, these results cannot be compared to department- or campus-wide evaluations, nor were averages provided for all of the TA’s in CCL for comparison purposes. It should also be noted that because state law required that students interning at for-profit companies earn college credit, significant numbers of students actively resented having to take the class, or resented the fact that they were required to do meaningful academic work in order to earn the units. While many of these students came to appreciate the course, some did not, and they reflected this in their evaluations. With regard to student comments, again in contrast to the standard practice with other courses, TAs were only shown but not provided with copies of the original evaluation forms, which apparently were not retained by the office (although I nonetheless managed to obtain copies from two of those quarters). As of the Winter 2009 quarter, student comments were included on the summaries provided to us.

Fall 2003: Introduction to Political Theory
29 students

Overall rating: 7.48 (mean), 7.86 (median)

Sample comments:

"Mark is a very knowledgeable TA. He is very helpful in class as well as outside."

"Mark did an excellent job at TAing. The material was difficult but he helped us at getting it."

"I think the way lecture was integrated with discussion was really good."

"Mark was a great TA. He knew his material and really wanted us to know it, too. He was very passionate about getting the deeper meaning of things."

Winter 2004: Introduction to Comparative Politics
41 students

Overall rating: 7.46 (mean), 7.34 (median)

Sample comments:

"Yay!"

"A very patient and well-intentioned TA, always willing to help students as much as they need."

"Mark was a really great TA who was knowledgeable and passionate about the material. He was concerned about our learning and I really enjoyed section."

"Mark was at first very intimidating but over the course of the quarter it gets easier to talk to him, and ask questions or throw out ideas that might be wrong. I think everyone felt really comfortable in the end. There really wasn't anything he couldn't explain or communicate. He's one of the best TA's I've had at UCLA, even though he does assign a lot of weekly assignments and makes you go to lecture but its very beneficial in the long run."

"After three years at UCLA, I must say that I've never had a more effective TA. Yes, his weekly assignments were unnecessary but in terms of conveying the breadth of the class, he did an excellent job. It was incredibly easy to get in touch with him, receive feedback, etc."

Spring 2004: Democratic Theory
45 students

Overall rating: 7.58 (mean), 8.28 (median)

Sample comments:

"Because of him I feel I succeeded in understanding the course material. He was very organized, very helpful, and always around. He would stay after discussion to chat and was interested in getting to know his students. A lot of homework assignments, but excellent grading, which was always done on time."

"Before I went to section for this class, during the first week, I was determined to drop the course."

However, after experiencing Mark's teaching style and communication skills I decided to stay. The learning environment in his section was amazing and very much interested me in the course!"

"Enjoyed discussion a lot, always left thinking. One of the best TA's I've had because discussion became a discussion that was worthwhile and enlightening."

"Mark Kaswan is a really great TA. He is one of the best TA's I ever had at UCLA. He is very nice and friendly, he makes students feel very comfortable and encourages them to go talk to him and wants to help. He did everything to help his students, make them feel welcome to go and talk to him. The discussion sections were great and he was great! Absolutely great!"

"One of the best TA's I've had at UCLA thus far. The fact that he welcomes students to ask questions and forces you to participate. He is helpful and knowledgeable. A++."

"Mark, I want to thank you for the excellent knowledge and organization you had on this course. Having you as my TA was enjoyable as well as advantageous, since you helped me understand and broaden my conceptions of this course."

Spring 2007: Citizenship and Public Service
43 students

Overall rating: 7.37 (mean), 7.97 (median)

Sample comments:

"Mark brings valuable real world experience and perspective to our discussions. He is well-versed in topics directly tied to this course."

"Mark balanced leading discussions and letting students lead perfectly. Every discussion was relevant, interesting and valuable."

"Mark has a lot to offer UCLA. He brings a mature demeanor and a strong knowledge of the information. I would recommend him to anyone."

"I thoroughly enjoyed the seminar style of discussion."

"I really got to like Mark as the quarter matured. Although we disagree ideologically, I appreciate his passion."

Summer 2004–Spring 2009: Corporate and Community-Based Internships
(no data available for Summer 2004–Summer 2005)

Fall 2005–Fall 2008 (4-point scale, n=178)

Meetings with my coordinator were worth my time and effort: 3.4 (mean); 3 (median)

I felt comfortable seeking help from my coordinator: 3.43(mean); 4.0 (median)

Fall 2008–Spring 2009 (9-point scale, n=35)

Overall rating: 7.23 (mean)

Sample comments:

"Mark invites students to think critically about politics, from the surface down to the depths and

undercurrents that are harder to grasp. He would make a really great professor, especially because he demands a certain standard that motivates students to try really hard to achieve.”

“Mark is easy to talk to and his insight is definitely very valuable. I feel that his comments on my papers have helped me learn how to write more critically and more in-depth.”

“The instructor is knowledgeable and helpful. It seems that he cares about how the students are doing at the internship.”

“Explained concepts very well, and helped apply them to the real world.”

“Mark helped me understand the ‘political science’ aspect of my internship and he helped me realize the ‘bigger picture’ of my internship. He was always helpful and nice. I really valued the meetings we had because it helped me to apply what I am working with to my education.”

“Mark always wants his students to think further, and this has been influential in fueling my academic curiosity.”