

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

In Spring 2006, I was a graduate student instructor for *War!* (an introductory international security class) at the University of California, Berkeley. As a graduate student instructor, I ran weekly hour and a half discussions for two sections of 25 students each. My goal was to improve students' critical reading, so that they could see connections between authors, make intelligent critiques and come to their own conclusions. In addition, I attended course lectures, graded student work, and held weekly office hours.

ANALYSIS OF STUDENT EVALUATIONS

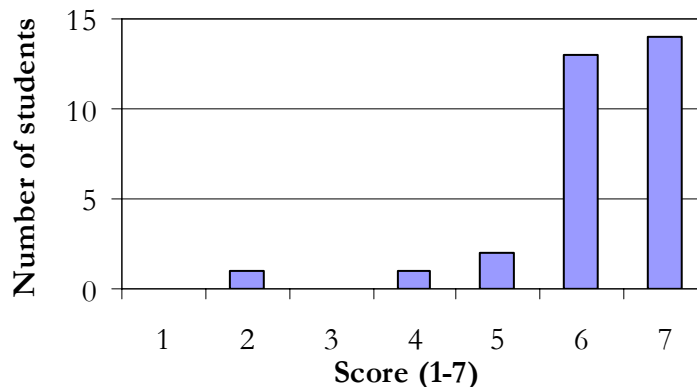
(Please see Appendix A for the complete set of student comments)

As a Graduate Student Instructor, my goal was to facilitate respectful, productive discussions that simultaneously helped students make sense of the reading and develop their own opinions about international relations. At the end of the semester, students expressed appreciation for “incredibly thought-provoking” discussions that “were among the best I’ve experienced in college.” My “passion for teaching political science” and “genuine interest in the subject” was evident to my students and they felt that I helped clarify authors’ “complicated language.”

Most importantly, students found the classroom to be a “good safe space” that “made you feel like you could say anything without being judged.” As one student wrote, “I’m shy, so I appreciated how Rachel let everyone speak if they had something to say.” Others agreed that I helped keep “discussion focused and cordial” with the right combination of “flexibility and patience.” Overall, students found discussions “so fun to attend,” especially because the group “never had any blank silences or quiet, forced conversation.”

On a 1-7 scale (7 being the highest), students in PS 124A gave me an overall score of 6.2 as a GSI (see Figure 1 for the score distribution). GSI ratings are not publicly available in my department, so I cannot compare my score to the department average. Evaluations, however, show that students enjoyed “freedom of thought and expression,” including one student who felt “it was definitely the best discussion class I have ever had at Berkeley!”

Figure 1: Teaching Evaluations for PS 124A (*War!*), Spring 2006



Appendix A

COURSE EVALUATIONS FOR RACHEL STERN COMPLETE SET

***PDF of the original evaluations available on request*

Graduate Student Instructor
War! (PS 124A)
University of California, Berkeley
2 sections: Thursday 10-12am, 2-4pm
Spring 2006

How does your GSI compare with other Political Science GSIs you have had? (scale 1-7)

Score: 6.2

32 responses/ 41 students

25/32 were Political Science majors

1. How approachable was the GSI? (Was s/he intimidating, responsive, supportive, friendly etc.)

- Rachel was the most approachable GSI I've had in two semesters at Cal. She is open-minded, rational, fair and fun to be around. As a result, I learn in a safe and professional manner.
- Rachel is very approachable and very fair in how she leads discussions. She makes sure that everyone gets involved and that if you have something to say then you get the chance to say it.
- Yes, but a little too strict. Needs to be less rigid, don't cut off the students.
- Very approachable. Willing to meet at student's request whether campus or telephone conference if needed. Her attitude and tone of voice is very welcoming to asking questions or sharing ideas. Helps you develop/clarify argument/discussion ideas making it easier to participate and absorb/understand the material.
- Rachel is the first GSI I have actually spoken with outside of section/class. She initiated the conversation, heard me out and gave me the impression that she genuinely cared.
- She is very friendly and easy to talk to. In the beginning, I thought she is a hard person to approach. Once I got to know her, I noticed that only her appearance is so serious, but not the real she.
- Rachel was very approachable, always friendly & her giving us her cell phone number was extremely helpful and generous of her.
- She was friendly and encouraged us to talk to her.
- Approachable
- Friendly, approachable and knowledgeable
- Responsive. Will always have a reply.

- Very approachable
- Very approachable. Available through phone, email or by appointment.
- Rachel was very approachable, friendly, willing to listen and available.
- Very friendly, non-intimidating, supportive and always interested in what I thought and what everyone in the class thought. Classes were always lively and ideas/opinions were freely exchanged during each period.
- Very approachable, responsive, supportive and friendly. Easy to talk to, not intimidating at all.
- Way too friendly
- Rachel was an extremely approachable person from day one. She never makes one feel stupid and she is very responsive to all the needs of a student (only if the student makes effort in going to her office hours and talking with her).
- Quite approachable
- Rachel was very friendly and easy to talk to and generally understanding
- She was very energetic and always willing to consider various opinions
- Rachel Stern has a passion for teaching political science that shines through during each discussion section. It is because of this that she is always approachable and helpful. She was very sweet and always made you feel like you could say anything without being judged.
- Very approachable. Rachel was very helpful when I asked her about a range of topics, like a theory I didn't understand or during a brainstorming session about internship ideas.
- Very approachable and knowledgeable of the material. She was never dismissive or visibly annoyed by any student comments.
- Very helpful. Always returns emails, etc.
- Everything except intimidating.
- She was very approachable and engaging.
- Rachel's style is very supportive. She does a great job of applying one's erratic comments to the relevant themes in the course.
- She was very approachable. She was friendly. If you talked or sent her interesting stuff, she would share it.
- She was approachable, supportive and seemingly cooperative.
- Very approachable.

2. How helpful was the GSI? (For example, in responding to questions, commenting on papers, in office hours, etc.)

- Rachel was very helpful to her students. No question was too awkward or inappropriate in the realm of our subject.

- Rachel always responded to my emails promptly and with very thorough answers. She held group study sessions that helped and gave good feedback on tests.
- Yes, helpful. Made herself available for questions outside of class.
- Response to assignments and exams were very clear and helpful. Also, sent out a rubric, very useful, of what an example response was, letting us know/clarifying what she was looking for. Very welcoming when sought clarification on concepts.
- Very
- She is not that helpful because she doesn't write a lot on the blackboard. So, I wish she could explain the materials more detail.
- Always helpful in paper and test comments. Very helpful in responding to specific questions on course material.
- She gave interesting answers to questions and wrote useful comments on exams.
- Really helpful. Has a very firm grasp of all material and is shown in her teaching.
- Very helpful
- Seemed very knowledgeable and communicated ideas effectively.
- Rachel very helpfully helped us to outline and comprehend the material covered in class and used for reading.
- I found Rachel to be very helpful as a GSI. Very committed, always opening her door. She even gave everyone, in class, during exam time, her phone number in case we had last minute questions.
- Very helpful, willing to answer questions, good feedback on exams.
- Rachel did a great job at fitting the student's questions and comments within theoretical frameworks and arguments.
- She was very helpful. Her office hours totally help you! I often have hard times understanding the language in the readings but she totally makes "clear" of the complicated language. And when asking about the questions I had of the readings, Rachel never made me feel stupid.
- Usually helpful. In grading, she took a pretty narrow viewpoint (i.e. didn't bother to understand an argument that was rooted in an outside discipline).
- Rachel did a great job of making sure that everyone understood the material going into discussion.
- When discussing readings and lectures in class, she was always well-prepared and often brought in extra material for us (from newspapers, etc).
- She took the time to come to class very prepared. She made a point to respond to all questions and she was the exact supplement necessary to a class as thorough and difficult as PS 124A.
- Very thorough, stays until everyone understands (ex: mid-term review)
- Very helpful and responsive. We should have a final review session.

- Good at helping put ideas into words
- Very helpful
- Very helpful. Rachel returned all of my emails in less than one day.
- Her responses to questions helped, in as much as she tied it into the course material.
- I usually went to office hours to review and each of those sessions was really useful.
- Commentary was adequate.
- Very helpful

3. How was the GSI as a discussion leader? (dominating, assertive, passive, creative, provocative, enthusiastic, boring, abstract, energetic, etc.)

- Rachel is the model, in my mind, for what a discussion leader should be: respectful, knowledgeable, and creative enough to teach on topics from multiple perspectives.
- Fair—gave everyone a chance to speak. She respected all opinions and always kept discussion going.
- Good. Yes, assertive. At times, dominating when leading the lecture/discussion, but at times passive and letting the students have their say. Also, she is enthusiastic which helps a lot to get through the discussion.
- She's the BEST discussion leader I've had. Not too dominating/passive. She knows how to lead the discussion, clarify points made, encourages students to share ideas/questions etc. Also, can take charge when the discussion is not going in the necessary direction or a student is not being concise for time/discussion space. Also, it is very helpful when she sends emails and lets us know what to focus on for reading and discussion.
- Kept discussion focused and cordial. Anytime you have a bunch of people sitting around talking about politics you're bound to watch an argument occur because of a misunderstanding. In our section, those misunderstandings were always clarified by Rachel before they could be misconstrued.
- She is very enthusiastic about the course.
- As a discussion leader, Rachel was very effective because she allowed us enough freedom to freely speak with each other, but still maintaining the topic. Some GSIs are too overpowering if you don't raise your hand or bring up contentious points, but Rachel's flexibility and patience were some of her best qualities as a GSI.
- She encouraged an open and engaging discussion, but sometimes allowed the section to go off-topic.
- Assertive, for the most part. At times, too forgiving in responding to statements or arguments, but I do see the need for a tradeoff here.
- Assertive enough to keep things under control and on-topic.
- Very assertive. I have an impression that I can be confident with her opinions.
- Active and energetic—ok for me.

- Excellent job in moderating a potentially volatile discussion section.
- Rachel is the best discussion leader I have ever had. Her prompts, guidance and input during discussions were extremely helpful for guiding the talks and was unobtrusive.
- Assertive, yet allowed everyone to voice their opinion. She guided the discussion and clarified individual's opinions when unclear.
- Not dominating—she led it with just the right level of assertiveness and pro-activeness. You could tell she has a passion and genuine interest in the subject.
- Assertive, just and provocative.
- Rachel was a very enthusiastic discussion leader. If people want a good and excellent GSI, they should get Rachel!
- Willing to take questions/comments, usually did a good job in leading.
- She was very enthusiastic in discussion and made it a welcome place for all opinions.
- She was very good at getting us to talk and allowed time for everyone to say what was on their mind.
- Her sections were so fun to attend. We not only touched on all the readings and the lectures, but we had ample time to discuss everything.
- Rachel was an effective facilitator and very skilled at asking the right questions and leading us back on track if we were distracted. Never had any blank silences or quiet forced conversation.
- Good at directing discussion, sometimes we got a little off track.
- Sometimes let a few students carry on for too long. Could move faster through ideas.
- Great knowledge base.
- Creative and enthusiastic.
- She stimulated discussion and allowed for us to express our opinions.
- Assertive, provocative, energetic. She is great for adding texture to abstracts.
- She was a good leader, usually keeping it focused but ongoing. Discussions were lively and useful. She also would be positive towards everything people said, making it applicable in some way.
- Discussions were productive
- Awesome

4. Was your GSI a fair grader? Explain.

- Yes. She explained her points on our paper/grades, including how to improve.
- Yes, I felt like she was always clear on her expectations and graded along those standards.

- A bit too picky. Too harsh on the first test.
- There was never a question in grading because she sent out a rubric for each exam clearly stating what a good answer would look like and the different key elements necessary to include. Making note of what she looks for helped guide how I studied and performed.
- Yes.
- Yes, because she explains what she is looking for.
- Rachel always gave enough comments to determine why you received a particular grade.
- Yes.
- Yes.
- A little too strict.
- Yes.
- Who knows? Maybe GSI was too tough, but I don't mind.
- Tough grader, but probably fair.
- Yes! I got graded based on my content and not my grammar!
- Yes, she handed out a grading rubric before the exam was given.
- Yes, she provided reasons for giving the grade that she did.
- If grades matter, yes.
- Yes, she made sure we had thorough knowledge of the material and we weren't BS-ing it.
- Usually good, but didn't bother to understand arguments rooted in other disciplines, even though we were "encouraged to think outside the box."
- Yes, we had given a very clear grading rubric given to us which she adhered to.
- Yes.
- Absolutely—she was right on each test (including the one where I performed poorly, comparatively)
- Fair grader, explained her grading.
- Yes, tough sometimes, but fair.
- I appreciated her analysis on mid-term essay answers.
- Very much so, you can see that she put a lot of thought into her comments.
- She was very fair and respectful of disagreements. When grading, she would focus more on the thought process than what papers would advocate for.
- I'm not one to complain. I put in the time and effort and my grades are satisfactory.
- Yes, I never had any complaints.
- Very, explained her grading.

5. What did you like most about section? What did you like the least? In what areas could the GSI improve his/her performance? If your GSI delivered a lecture to the class, please give your general impression(s).

- Rachel was always prepared for class and energetic enough to wake up the “non-morning people.” She had us discuss topics in ways that impressed us as a group.
- What I liked the most was the debates. Least: large group work.
- Application to current events is very good. Rachel could be less tense and that would be better. Other than that, she’s enthusiastic and energetic which really helped me enjoy attending the discussions.
- The discussion—how it ran was perfect. What I liked least was how some students tended to dominate the discussion, but she did a good job of mediating it.
- I hate sections (usually) because there’s always someone who thinks that they know everything (especially at Cal). Rachel was great because she could give them their moment, but get the discussion back on track.
- Least: too many personal opinions.
- I liked our class-wide discussions, but didn’t think that when we broke down into small groups it was very helpful. The class-wide discussions were among the best I’ve experienced in college.
- The section was always interesting. I liked how almost everyone contributed to the discussion.
- Good discussion. Better level of understanding than lectures.
- Section is good and lively, lots of discussion. Everyone gets to say something. Maybe we should discuss more lectures.
- Good debates in discussions. Freedom of thought expressed and allowed.
- Rachel’s discussion leading was most excellent. I honestly can’t offer improvements for performance.
- Discussions were great. I wish we had less though and more time breaking down the reading.
- Rachel is simply awesome. Not only is she very knowledgeable about our readings, but she’s very approachable as well and she used this quality to bring about incredibly thought-provoking discussions in class. She’s a great discussion moderator.
- I thought we discussed general topics too much, but it was interesting at parts.
- I have no complaints about section. I enjoyed every meeting and I can honestly say that she was the best GSI I’ve had in my four years at Cal.
- I liked that we all participated—this is definitely the best discussion class I have ever had at Berkeley!
- Most-thorough. Least-nothing wrong.

- Good safe space. I'm shy, so I appreciated how Rachel let everyone speak if they had something to say.
- I liked the discussions we had a lot. I thought they were well-run and we came up with interesting ideas. I did not like the group work.
- I liked hearing her opinions. Didn't like how some students were allowed to dominate discussion.
- Good conversation.
- More visuals would be helpful. Rachel is the best GSI I've had in my four years.
- I wish she had lectured! The atmosphere was conducive to exploration.
- By the end of the semester, her teaching was great. I liked the simulation.