

Additional Evidence of Teaching Excellence

MARY NICKEL

In addition to favorable student evaluations discussed below, my aptitude for teaching is also substantiated by my pedagogical training, peer evaluation through Princeton's McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning, and institutional recognition of my excellence in teaching.

Department of Religion Graduate Teaching Award

In 2020, I received an award from Princeton University's Religion Department for best Assistant Instructor in the Department.

Teaching Transcript

I have satisfied the requirements for Princeton University's Teaching Transcript Program, which gives graduate students an opportunity to develop as educators. The program requires that students participate in at least five interactive pedagogy workshops, train and serve as Assistant Instructors, undergo a class observation with a follow-up evaluation, and draft and revise a teaching philosophy and an original syllabus. I have continued attending pedagogy workshops after satisfying the requirement, having already attended seven and with plans to attend three more in the coming year.

In his evaluation following my classroom observation session, a Teaching Fellow said that the speed-dating activity I used to galvanize students' writing practice was a "big success," and that he intended to replicate the exercise in his own classes. Even more importantly, he observed that during a class on reparations—a sensitive and provocative subject—I "made sure the classroom is inclusive to students of diverse backgrounds and helped students to practice pivoting difficult conversations in a classroom setting." He concluded that my teaching was "truly amazing and inspiring."

Wabash Doctoral Teaching Seminar

In 2018, I was selected to participate in a Doctoral Student Seminar with the Wabash Center for Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion under the guidance of Evelyn Parker and Reid Locklin. This two-day Seminar facilitated participants' development in critically reflective teaching, syllabus and lecture design, and including diverse voices in the classroom.

Student Evaluations: Quantitative Analysis

The following table identifies the scores I received as an Assistant Instructor. Further information about my student evaluations is available on request.

	My score	Average score for AIs in the course	Average AI score at Princeton that semester
WWS 370: Ethics & Public Policy Section 5 (F-17)	4.56	4.22	4.01
WWS 370: Ethics & Public Policy Section 8 (F-17)	4.80	4.22	4.01
REL 261: Christian Ethics & Modern Society Section 1 (F-19)	4.55	4.28	4.04
REL 261: Christian Ethics & Modern Society Section 2 (F-19)	4.56	4.28	4.04

Student Evaluations: Qualitative Evaluation Data

[Note: at Princeton discussion sections are usually called “precepts,” and TAs are called “preceptors.”]

Several themes emerge from the evaluations. First, students say that I help them to *grasp course material*.

- “The discussions in precept really helped me prepare for exams and clarify confusing topics.”
- “Mary's non-linear structures, contrasting with reading and lecture, really helped sell the material.”
- “She created a great balance of group discussion/participation and teaching that helped solidify concepts from lectures/readings.”
- “Mary was an excellent preceptor who helped us grasp a better understand of the material and was willing to spend precept on anything that we, the class, needed help with.”
- “Precepts with Mary were great! She tries her best to explain tough concepts in a new, fun way.”
- “Precepts were conducted in a very helpful manner and clarified important or difficult topics.”

Second, students note that I *prioritize inclusivity* in the classroom.

- “I believe that all students in the precept were able to participate and were able to learn more.”
- “[Mary] always attempted to incorporate diverse voices and frequently prepared creative activities that allowed us to engage with the material.”
- “Precepts with Mary were wonderful and very inclusive. She always attempted to incorporate diverse voices and frequently prepared creative activities that allowed us to engage with the material presented in readings and lectures more dynamically.”
- “Mary encouraged and gave the chance for everybody to speak.”

Third, students share that they find me *accessible when they need additional help*.

- “She always made herself available for specific questions and concerns.”
- “Very earnest and knowledgeable, and seemed really invested in our success and wanted to help us.”
- “Mary was probably the most responsive to questions, opinions, and criticism I've ever experienced.”

Fourth, students appreciate *my engaging and enthusiastic teaching style*.

- “Mary's non-linear structures, contrasting with reading and lecture, really helped sell the material.”
- “She often gave interesting activities that allowed for a further extension of learning.”
- “I so appreciated how thoughtfully she framed each of our conversations, and she endeavored to know everyone ... She often prepared rubrics/questions/activities that helped catalyze conversation.”
- “Her enthusiasm for material covered in class is contagious and she never failed to animate discussion in precept with her questions, thought experiments, and mock debates.”
- “I thought Mary's precepts were amazing. Mary's energy was infectious, and the way we discussed practical applications of the philosophical ideas we learned about in lecture was excellent.”
- “She was lively and put in a lot of effort to make precept interesting and make us think about topics in new ways. This effort paid off.”

Several students claimed that I was the best preceptor they had while at Princeton.