CCT Classroom Observation Form

To be completed by the graduate student being observed

After this section is completed, email this document as Word Doc to your observer.

Instructor: Antong Liu
Date/Time: 10:20 AM - 11:10 AM, 09/28/2018
Location: Friedl 118
No. of Students: 8
Course Title: Introduction to Political Philosophy (Discussion)
Topic(s) of Day: Aristotle's *Politics*

1) The goal or outcome I have in mind for my students during this class session is:

I plan to discuss two topics in Aristotle's *Politics*: Aristotle's view on natural slavery and his view on democracy. To do this, I pick several relevant passages from the work to read and examine with students together. The purpose of this discussion is to get students familiarized with the academic practice of close reading. I hope that students at the end of the section will come to see the nuances in the text and better appreciate the importance to examine the text closely. This is going to be helpful for them to better finish the paper assignment too, which is due soon.

2) During this class session, I would like the observer to pay particular attention to, and give me feedback on the following:

I aim to moderate the discussion such that students have more opportunities to express their own opinions. However, given the difficulty of this class, I sometimes have to intervene to keep the conversation going. I would like the observer to comment on whether my own participation sometimes is too much. In particular, I would like to know if I am concise enough when talking, and if I seem to impose too much my own opinion that damage the atmosphere of a "free" discussion. Finally, this is the first time I adopt the practice of reading passages with students together. Please let me know if students are sufficiently engaged.

To be completed by the observer

Use your handwritten "field" notes to create narrative answers. Your responses to these questions may vary in length. Focus on what you saw that 1) acknowledges what was done very well in the class session, and 2) provides constructive feedback on aspects of teaching that are actionable. Email this completed observation form back to the TA/instructor as a pdf.

Your name: Christina Bejjani   **Date completed**: Observation (09/28/18), form (09/30/18)

1) Describe what happened in this class session. What was done by the TA/instructor and/or the students? What teaching methods did you observe? How effective were these activities and methods in achieving the goal or student outcome that the TA/instructor had set out for this class session? Explain.

The instructor opened the discussion section by answering student questions about their upcoming paper assignment, laid out guidelines for the discussion of Aristotle's arguments in favor of and against slavery, read aloud with students the chapters they should have read before class, discussed the chapters with students, broke students into two groups to discuss the material, and then reconvened class to discuss the material as a group. I think the instructor was quite successful in engaging the students and ensuring that they understood the nuances of the text. I think the instructor was also successful in getting students to understand the importance of close academic reading, emphasizing that they needed to refer to specific parts of the text to support their arguments (although this also brought up a question: how detailed? While listing out the arguments pro and against slavery, students mostly referred to the line number, but not specific words (except on occasion) that Aristotle used).

2) What "worked" particularly well during this class session? Were there any small-group activities, assignments, or teaching strategies in particular that you think the TA/instructor should continue to use?

There were several components that worked well. The instructor chatted with students about their papers, seating choices, and nonacademic topics before class in a way that made it clear that the students were quite comfortable with the instructor. Indeed, students were not at all afraid or reluctant to sit right next to the instructor, and 7/8 students arrived on time or earlier than the class start time (the other student didn't attend class). Every single student spoke in the class and spoke frequently.

The instructor was also good at giving feedback to students while they interacted and discussed they text that they had just read out loud. The instructor was also effective in laying out

guidelines for discussing such a controversial topic (e.g., slavery), which could have gone much worse or gotten much more heated than it did.

Although the students were supposed to read the texts before class, reading the texts aloud with the students is an effective way of ensuring that even if they hadn't, they could still participate in class. Of note, however, is that this took about 10 minutes (and the class went over by 4 minutes). I like the idea – I wonder if the instructor could cut back on that time by having the students review the material for 5 minutes and write down some summaries (or start jotting in their thoughts pro/against slavery on the sheet) of what they read. That way, even if they haven't read the material, they have some time to skim, and overall that would get everyone started on the worksheet the instructor provided. (But note that what the instructor did was already effective, so this is a minor suggestion).

While the students were discussing arguments pro/against slavery, the instructor sat near the students and offered some perspective, while challenging them to probe the text further. When the instructor reconvened the class, he called on the students who did not "report" their group's main points, ensuring that they too had gotten a chance to say all their thoughts as well.

3) Was there a point during this class session when the TA/instructor "lost" student attention? If so, what do you think caused it? How did the TA/instructor react, what did he/she do to regain student attention? Were the TA/instructor's efforts in this regard effective?

Not that I noticed, honestly. It was remarkable how attuned and interested the students were in the discussion of the material.

4) How did the physical surroundings or environment of the class session affect the learning experience, if at all? (For example, the temperature or set up of the classroom, the time of day, number of students in the class, outside noise, lighting, problems with equipment or technology, etc.)

The classroom was a perfect size for the class, and added to the atmosphere: namely, with the roundtable, it felt natural for the students and instructor to converse about the material, rather than the students to be "instructed" or "lectured to."

5) What suggestions do you have for the TA/instructor you observed in terms of expansion of particularly effective teaching strategies, improvement of teaching strategies that didn't work well, solving problems you observed, etc.?

During discussion, one of the student phones dinged in class, despite the class policy on putting away cell phones. I don't know if that is a common occurrence or worth discussing for the future (it was a short distraction). Likewise, one of the students was definitely multitasking during class (e.g., answering an email in class). At the very least, when students are doing their group discussion (filling out their worksheets) or just reading out loud in class, it might be beneficial to have them close their laptops, so that there is no temptation to be distracted.

Notably, the students formed two groups that were essentially the men vs. the women in the class. It might be better for the instructor to assign the groups or say that the students closest to him should form one group and those farthest are another group? It seemed strange, because one of Aristotle's comparisons for slavery was that to womanhood, so having an all woman group and an all man group for the discussion was an unintentional, perhaps not ideal, effect.

Breaking the class into 2 groups after discussing the material a little was already effective. One other thought I had was whether the instructor could have them try to tackle the material together sooner? Also, perhaps let them know of how long they have to discuss the material. This will help ensure that the class does not go over time again. Finally, again, it already worked the way the instructor did this in the class, but perhaps the students in the two groups could write their arguments pro/against slavery on the whiteboard? That way, students in each group could write notes on the different sections and get a better sense for what the other group discussed. I think this was already done well, but if the instructor wanted to take advantage of the white board, this is one suggestion.

6) Other comments or observations:

With regard to one of the learning goals, the instructor spoke just enough in the class; he clarified points for the students while letting them work through the material on their own as well. This was a good, engaging class to observe.