
Report Comments

The Faculty Individual Module Report contains the results gathered during the last week of the AY2019/20 Semester 2.

Students were invited to share their feedback on the teaching and the course material, ultimately to help improve the overall quality of education at our institution.

Response Rate for YHU3283: Fundamental Reality

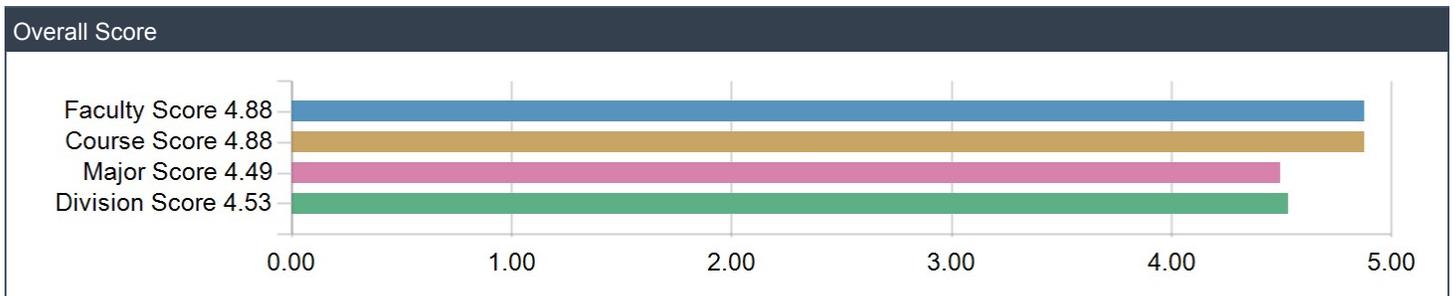
Raters	Students
Responded	16
Invited	17
Response Ratio	94.12%

AY2019/20 S2 - Professor Neil Mehta's Mean Score for YHU3283: Fundamental Reality

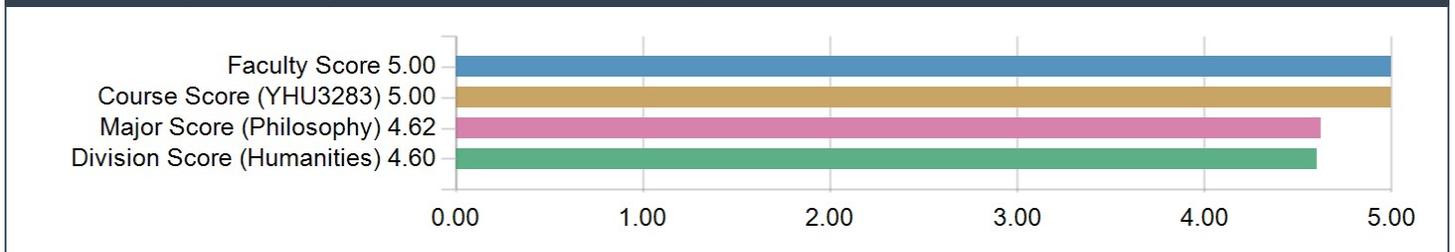
C1: Express your level of agreement with the following statements

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Standard Deviation	Mean
The seminar professor helped me understand course concepts.	16	0	0	0	0	0.00	5.00
The seminar professor challenged me to actively engage the material.	14	2	0	0	0	0.34	4.88
I am motivated to explore beyond the material I encountered in seminar.	12	4	0	0	0	0.45	4.75
I found it easy to obtain prompt feedback from the seminar professor.	14	2	0	0	0	0.34	4.88
The seminar professor's response to my work were valuable.	15	0	1	0	0	0.50	4.88

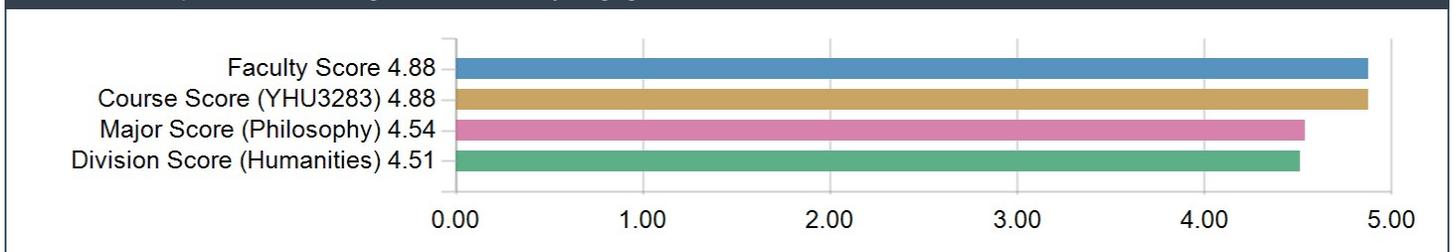
Faculty Mean Score for YHU3283: Fundamental Reality vs all YHU3283 (if more than one group) vs Philosophy vs Humanities



1. The seminar professor helped me understand course concepts.



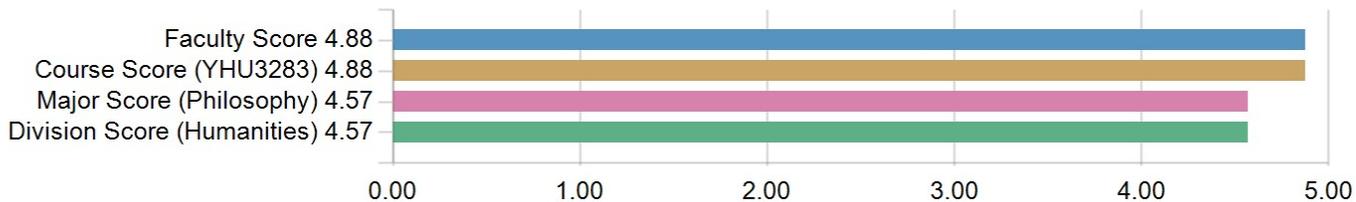
2. The seminar professor challenged me to actively engage the material.



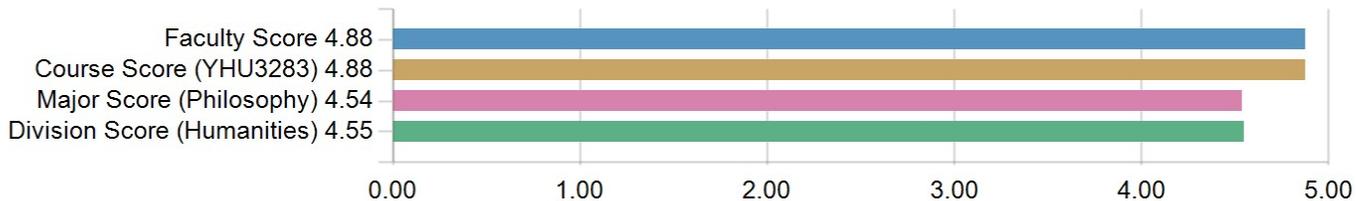
3. I am motivated to explore beyond the material I encountered in seminar.



4. I found it easy to obtain prompt feedback from the seminar professor.

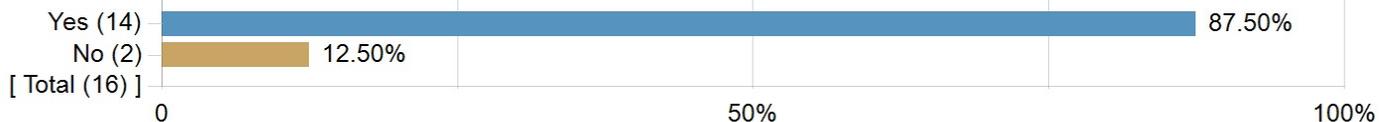


5. The seminar professor's response to my work were valuable.



C2: Did you interact with professor outside of class?

C2: Did you interact with professor outside of class?



Options	Score	Count	Percentage
Yes	1	14	87.50%
No	2	2	12.50%

C3: Indicate your level of agreement to the following statement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Standard Deviation	Mean
I received constructive assistance.	12	2	0	0	0	0.36	4.86

Student effort in the class

B1: Describe your effort in this course compared to others you have taken at Yale-NUS. It is breakdown by course if faculty taught more than one course.

Name	Much more effort	More effort	Average effort	Less effort	Much less effort	Standard Deviation	Mean
YHU3283: Fundamental Reality	3	5	8	0	0	0.79	3.69

B2: Please select the exact number of hours you spent on this course in a typical week, not including scheduled seminar or lecture time.

Name	1hr	2hr	3hr	4hr	5hr	6hr	7hr	8hr	9hr	10hr
YHU3283: Fundamental Reality	0	0	0	3	5	2	3	1	0	0

Name	11hr	12hr	13hr	14hr	15hr	16hr	17hr	18hr	19hr	20hr	Mean
YHU3283: Fundamental Reality	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6.25

Course Overall

A1: What helped you learn in the course overall? (for example, lecture, seminar discussions, seminar professor, readings, assignments, and connections to other courses). Briefly explain why you found them helpful.

Comments
Seminar discussions with Neil are the highlight of my academic time at Yale–NUS. To support these seminars, Neil's homeworks help me focus on the key sections of the text. In addition, the papers also push me to learn more and apply my skills. Beyond academics, Neil is an incredibly caring and thoughtful person. I loved the "intermissions" in which Neil provides helpful advice about life in general (e.g. how to cope with anxiety or learn new skills). Frankly, I think I have become a better person and a better philosopher as a result of taking classes with Neil. For this, I will forever be grateful.
Neil is very clear in how he explains the concepts in the readings, and he makes sure that everyone understands the main concepts that we need to know to have a strong foundation in the course. The readings have been mostly challenging but also reasonable. The weekly homework helps to focus my understanding of the elements that will be focused on in class, and introduces important tools explained in a very clear way. The draft submissions and peer review also helped me write a more concise and coherent paper. The agenda written on the board before every class was also very helpful in orientating what the focus of the class would be and giving an overview of what to expect. I liked the break–out group discussions as well. Mapping out the arguments on the board has also been very helpful in keeping the discussion clear and on–track, as well as ensuring precision from all of us. It also helps greatly when Neil helps to synthesise and paraphrase class contributions to make them clearer and more concise.
Reading selections were wide and varied, covered a lot of ground. Hacky–sack system ensured everyone got a chance to participate. Homework was good in preparing for class, though I also did appreciate when he reduced the frequency as the semester became more uncertain. Argument dissection was helpful not just for understanding readings but for practicing skills.
The seminar discussions help the most. Neils' method of calling on students creates a great opportunity for us to practice articulating our thoughts and thinking on the spot.
Seminar discussions, readings, assignments, and self–initiated consultations and peer discussions. Primarily, I think the warmup and cooldown exercises were well–designed and chief in preparing me for class. In doing so, my learning for class was maximized. Further, being asked to pose answers in class pushed me on the spot to recognize my strengths and weaknesses in a way that was refreshingly challenging.
Seminar discussions were very helpful in helping me understand ideas covered in readings and think about opposing views and possible objections. Hearing from classmates through facilitated discussions was the most helpful out of everything.
I found this course especially helpful to hone my writing skills than in any other class at YNC. While I do not seek to compare classes between profs as everyone has their own style, the structure of Fundamental Reality led me to know exactly 'what' and 'how' to write an argumentative essay. to be specific, the handouts and weekly homeworks allowed me to know if I have grasped an idea before and after a seminar.

Comments
<p>I found that the handouts were the most helpful. For, they presented a set of skills that were key to the assignments and seminars that we were allowed to learn at our own time. These handouts and their sequential progression has allowed me to identify weaker points for improvement.</p>
<p>The themes of readings were very clear and the readings were well-chosen because they summarised key positions on the topic in metaphysics. Seminar discussions were conducted in an extremely clear manner and this helped with my being able to keep up with class in spite of the level of difficulty of the content being high. The warm-up and cool-down assignments kept me engaged with the class material and directed my attention to the crucial points in each article. Furthermore, they were good opportunities to practise argumentative and writing skills. In class, hacky-sack-based participation led me to structure and refine my contributions such that they would be as valuable as possible.</p>
<p>Seminars, weekly assignments</p>
<p>The seminar professor was key to my learning in this course. For his classroom facilitation skills and choice of material ensured I was actively engaged and challenged in class throughout the semester. Additionally, the professor created a safe environment conducive for learning as individuals were encouraged to participate and learn from mistakes.</p>
<p>The seminar discussions were very helpful because they were extremely well facilitated. Neil was also extremely clear in his explanation of the readings (which were often confusing) and extremely prompt with his feedback (the grades for the first paper came back within a week or so).</p>
<p>The Seminar Professor helped me learn the material extensively. Prof. Mehta's seminar classes were excellent. He had a clear plan for the material he wanted to share, and structured the class accordingly. The readings were of sufficient difficulty to be challenging and leave room for learning in the classroom, which Prof Mehta managed expertly.</p>
<p>Prof Mehta's homework assignments include introductions to skills that are important in philosophy and life generally. Mehta does an excellent job of finding specific ways to train these writing, discussion, and intellectual skills. This has been very useful for my learning.</p>
<p>Fundamental Reality is a course that offers no penalty for missing class beyond that you missed class. This policy is representative of what makes the course work so well— much of the course revolves around giving students reasons to do things rather than penalties for not doing them.</p>
<p>Many classes begin with explorations of fairly straightforward arguments, which get more complex as we introduce objections and replies. Getting students to engage with these arguments invites us to go further, to read more closely. The class asks students for their own thoughts rather than just asking them to reconstruct the thoughts of an established philosopher. This gives students a chance to exercise their minds, and a compelling reason to care.</p>
<p>The way the the seminar discussions were really well managed, the weekly homework</p>
<p>Seminar</p>

A2: How could this course change in the future to improve student learning?

Comments
I really love this seminar as is. However, I miss having lunch with Neil to continue our discussions as we did after Why Be Moral.
The last reading (Haslanger) was not a very good reading for me because I struggled to see the metaphysical implications even during class. The language of the paper was confusing. Perhaps it is also because I know too much about discourse on gender, and the paper has not aged too well since 2000.
Although I think that the hacky-sack policy is very good in ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to speak, I also wonder if it's possible for people to opt out from the hacky-sack (if perhaps they were having an off-day? They might not want to speak in class, might be particularly prone to anxiety that day, or might have had a few bad days that led to them not being prepared enough to contribute in class, but still wanting to be in class to learn) maybe a maximum for three times, after which it may be indicative of a bigger underlying issue. I would also hope for more opportunities for student debate and interaction. I think the addition of allowing students to volunteer to answer questions, and free-for-all question times are good, and I hope for more. However, I understand that time is limited.
NA
I think this course is perfectly designed.
I believe the warmup/cooldown exercises are already well-designed. The course material is esoteric enough that there is a limit to student learning without the seminar professor. Hence, if there was a way to improve seminar professor's teachings before and after seminar, that would be excellent for reasons such as priming the student as well as retaining information.
Leave more time for questions, or open up a discussion page on canvas so that students may pose questions to the whole class, and prof and/or classmates may feel free to answer them. This leaves class time untouched, but allows for all questions to be answered, and for more knowledge sharing!
It took me a while to fully get a sense of how classes are conducted and the purpose of (very) active class discussions, weekly homework, course handouts. In my opinion, having a section detailing the purpose and style of certain things done in class helps me to better prepare for the course.
I realise this might involve even more work, but basic handouts on the readings, such as the one given when we were reading Lewis greatly helped with following the lesson.
We could spend time on larger topics in metaphysics as the semester goes on and rather than spend one to two weeks on a debate between two philosophers, expand it to spending three weeks analysing arguments from several philosophers. There could be just one warm-up/cool-down assignment weekly.
the large group discussion is already sufficient but allocating just a bit of time (5mins) for small-group discussions might prepare students more for the large-group
The course could include certain prerequisites for registration. Being someone who is not well-versed or experienced in philosophy, i found it a little challenging at times. The learning experience might have been better if I had entered the course with certain skills. However, I acknowledge that Professor Neil Mehta helps individuals of all abilities to improve themselves and acquire the skills needed for the course.
It is almost perfect as it is. However, because this course is supposed to fulfil the "Formal Analysis" requirement of the Philosophy major, perhaps it can be somehow tweaked to emphasise formal logic more, which I feel was a little lacking.
This is a phenomenal course already. One improvement might be in the material, at this point the course feels like a broad overview of metaphysics in analytic philosophy, but I wonder if it would be possible to structure the course around ideas or questions that make it feel like one narrative, and allows our learning of different authors to stack up more effectively. Perhaps that will require the course to focus on a specific metaphysical debate (such as Monism and its opponents).
While each section of the course was interesting, sometimes the stakes of each argument were less than clear. This was particularly true in our unit about metaphysical priority, in my view. If the monists or the pluralists are right about what has metaphysical priority, what changes? Why is that change worth analysis? Giving students a decisive answer to the "so what" question for each argument would make an engaging course even more engaging.
I can't think of anything, it is really good as it is!
I really like it the way it already is

A3: Briefly describe how your seminar professor taught the seminar, including any distinctive features or activities.

Comments
I love seminars with Neil! First, prof is incredibly concise and precise with his explanations. As such, I learn a lot from each and every minute of class. Second, prof is extremely affirmative while still being honest about our responses. In particular, prof identifies mistakes as "productive failures" and emphasizes how these are learning opportunities. Third, prof calls on students to ensure everyone contributes to class, which ensures a balanced learning environment. However, there are opportunities to volunteer which is a nice addition from the previous seminar as this allows students a bit more agency.
Very clear seminar outline, hack-sacks to track student participation, some break-out group discussions, very good use of the whiteboard.
He made each of us submit homework that could only be done by doing the readings. In class, he gave each of us hacky-sacks that were used to determine who had or had not spoken. We usually dissected arguments and tried to come up with objections to them. In the 2nd half of the semester he allowed for more group-based work.
Group discussion, break-out groups on specific topics.
Warmup, cooldown exercises, followed by a seminar of introductions, questions and answers and reflections. Occasionally, there would be the varied form of purely argument and rebuttals.
Seminar is essentially a facilitated discussion between students and the seminar professor, and everyone gets a chance to speak. Key ideas from readings are covered before we delve into more complex ideas and objections to push our learning/thinking skills.
I found a mix between the first half and second half's technique to be the best. That is, to have a loser rule of class participation but without the added stress for mini groups because the difference between student levels were obvious.
Here, I found the most distinctive feature to be the structured lesson plan. Following that roadmap by starting with explanations first, and then allowing for some unplanned discussion later, worked well.
The seminar professor outlined key arguments in the text and invited us to give original arguments to attack or support the conclusions of the key arguments. Participation was mostly based on responding when the professor called on students, and participation content was personalised to students' levels of learning.
defining each term, dissecting each argument, allocating each student a hackey sack to throw and contribute to the discussion, talking about the bigger picture of the significance of these arguments
Classroom discussions were the main mode of teaching. Each lesson students are expected to make at least 1 meaningful contribution to the discussion. Smaller breakout group discussions were also experienced. The white board was utilised frequently too.
Neil is one of the best and easily the most conscientious professor I know. He puts an immense amount of effort into coming up with the homework assignments, the answer keys, the planning and execution of the seminars, and trying to make adjustments as needed. I daresay one will not find another professor with the same amount of dedication to teaching. The distinctive feature of Neil's seminars is that they are always extremely tightly-controlled and well-structured. Much like a good paper, one always know where they are and where they are going. Neil enforces participation from everyone and goes through the material extremely meticulously, step-by-step. That really helps in helping people get a grasp of the material.
Prof Mehta has an excellent seminar style that he has worked sincerely to improve the student experience. I find the controlled discussion (where students do not participate unless asked) along with questions which Neil then asks particular students to participate on really improves the student attention in the class. This is because, each student can expect to participate in class (which in itself improves participation), but does not know at what point they will be asked to participate. This is coupled with Neil's non-judgemental and encouraging style, that makes students confident about being wrong in seminar, which is crucial for learning.
Neil has also carefully planned the material he teaches in class. This is crucial to an insightful seminar experience where the professor is never spends minutes on end finding his way or repeating ideas due to poor planning or failing to cover important ideas.
Finally, Neil takes time off in the middle of seminar to share personal reflections that are unrelated to seminar. He also focuses on imparting skills through his homework assignments and in class. The sincere effort to use the course to help students improve in general aspects of life is wonderful, and really improves student investment and take-away from this class. Neil has carefully planned these skills and mastered the art of finding specific ways to improve student writing and discussion. This really helps learning and makes the class experience one of personal investment.
The seminar professor used hackey-sacks to call on students. Every student participated in every seminar. Homework regularly focused on skill-building as well as reconstructing arguments from the texts.
During seminar, everyone is ensured a turn to speak, and Neil takes these opportunities to clarify any misunderstandings we might have about the text
prof focused on one or two key concepts each week and explore them in great depth

D1: Please use this space to elaborate on your previous responses or to address other issues such as classroom atmosphere; most or least helpful course materials, readings, or topics; or any other specific suggestions or concerns about the course.

Comments
No further feedback
Classroom atmosphere was sometimes a bit stilted and inorganic – not necessarily a bad thing, but sometimes can interrupt the flow/momentum of discussion (or just be not conducive for such a flow/momentum).
The least helpful course reading was the Haslanger reading.
Most helpful readings – Quine, Schaffer on Grounding, Priest on Emptiness. Least helpful readings – Halsanger: Not sure what the point of this was.
N/A.
The classroom atmosphere was fantastic, and this was chiefly maintained by the seminar professor. This allowed candid and honest answers on topics which are extremely valuable. My only extremely minor criticism would be the links made to earlier topics which I felt could have been more frequent. Otherwise, structurally it felt like the concepts were studied in isolation. Surely, they were not, but more could be done to improve the links between concepts, as well as refreshers to recall earlier topics. In fact, I believe in addition to warmup and cooldown exercises, "refresher" exercises could be designed in order to facilitate this.
NIL; this has been my favourite course I've taken in Yale–NUS :)
I found the random remarks by our professor on tips to keep in mind when contributing in class to be significantly helpful. This made me more aware and conscious of when i speak
I thought that while the smaller sessions of groupwork was great, we needed more reminders to actively use the skills that were taught. For example, skills like listening attentively, or structuring an idea are sometimes forgotten when in smaller groups. However, I admit I do not know how solve this.
Classroom atmosphere was positive, but this could be due to a serendipitous gelling between students in the class. Voluntary participation which kicked in after mid–semester course evaluations were great to enliven debates of interest to us. The gender readings near the end of the course are great for understanding analytic philosophy about categories we use, but seem out of place with regard to the current understandings of these social categories.
I love how an intimate space was created to really dig deeper into the discussions, and hear each other out. while handouts were helpful, I think the class discussions and whiteboards were more than sufficient in understanding difficult concepts. The readings were all really interesting and came into conversation with each other in fascinating ways. Of course, this was out of our control, but I really wish we had more time to discuss how metaphysics can be applied to causes such as feminism.
NA
I really enjoyed the Priest and Garfield readings.
I would simply refer back to my comments earlier, which are extensive and also exhaust my views on the course.
I found the course very well–taught. The classroom atmosphere was positive; there was universal engagement with the philosophical problems we discussed each seminar.
hot take: i think students need more preparation before taking this class, this shouldn't be a pre–requisite free course. At least in this iteration of the course, I felt that there was a huge spread in the kind of preparation students had, and I felt that that hurt the momentum of the class discussions quite often over the course of the semester.
I love the hackey sacks