Course Evaluations

I have a number of teaching strengths:

I. Ability to explain difficult topics clearly

I have taught research methods and philosophy of science to MA students in the Nijmegen University Public Administration programme, for whom the abstract and theoretical nature of philosophical problems is often difficult because it differs so much from the equally complex but more practical problems that they usually learn to solve. Nevertheless -- and I know what kind of examples work because I have studied social science myself -- I am able to teach such students philosophy by showing explicitly for every philosophical theory how it bears upon the issues that come up in their other modules:

“Wouter Kalf wist de ingewikkelde stof goed inzichtelijk te maken” (Bestuurskundige Onderzoeksbenaderingen, Nijmegen)

I have also taught metaethics at the University of Leeds, which is a notoriously difficult subject for students. A senior member of staff delivered the lectures, after which we split up to each lead a seminar on the same topic. Halfway through the module one of my colleague’s students sent the following email to me:

“May I attend your tutorial instead? I have friends who are in your tutorial group, and they have told me you are really great at making the theories appear a lot clearer” (Metaethics, Leeds)

On request of Professor Stoneham, I also taught normative ethics at the University of York, delivering the remaining lectures of this module to fill in for the previous lecturer who had become ill. Professor Stoneham told me that the students were nervous about the exam. I had the task to get them up and running again. I decided to explain the core problem of ethics (answering the question: ‘what ought I to do, morally speaking?’) and to present the various theories as answers to this question, as opposed to the historical overview that they had had before me. After my first lecture, one of the students emailed professor Stoneham (of course they had heard that they would get a new lecturer) with the following note:

“I just wanted to say that Wouter Kalf is amazing! Everyone was buzzing after the lecture about how things actually made sense and how he made everything so much more interesting. Good choice!” (Normative Ethics, York)

II. Ability to create an open and friendly environment ideal for teaching and learning

I believe that much of what students do is influenced by how they feel. My theories may be interesting, and my explanation might be flawless, but if my students’ emotions are not congruent with a motivated and open learning attitude, I will not achieve much. I therefore believe that a good teacher creates an environment in which students feel relaxed, understood, and most importantly: respected and unjudged.

My students often comment positively on my demeanour:

“I am certain that if you so choose you will be a fantastic lecturer – you clearly are very knowledgeable and you are very affable, a winning combo!” (Normative Ethics, York)

My students in Nijmegen similarly praised my ability to create a good learning environment:
“Kalf legt heel helder uit en houdt iedereen er automatisch bij” (Bestuurskundige Onderzoeksbenederingen, Nijmegen)

Creating a good atmosphere in class also involves awareness of differences between students: cultural differences, gender issues (in its many facets), psychological dispositions, and differences in styles of learning. It is important for myself to be aware of these differences, but also for students. I teach my students this awareness by giving them small group work in seminars for which they have to collaborate with people who are clearly not their close friends. I also tell them about the workings of the academic world, for instance I explain how the British Society for Ethical Theory has introduced a very advanced system for ensuring that the Q&A session after the research presentations at its annual conference is conducted fairly, taking into account differences between junior and senior researchers, native and non-native speakers, et cetera.

III. Ability to deliver timely and accurate marking

I find it very important to keep to deadlines, and keep my promises. I have never been late with marking and colleagues agree that I am a fair and precise marker:

“I could not find a single mark I disagreed with” (Dr Alix Cohen, Leeds)

“I looked over your marking and found it to be well done. I have no specific recommendations about how it can be improved. Just keep up the good work” (Dr Matthew Smith, Leeds)

IV. Ability to enthuse students

I have been very fortunate to receive many encouraging student evaluations. A full evaluation report has not been requested for this application, but I have it available and can send it to you upon request. Here I present some excerpts from an evaluation report of a Master’s module that I designed and delivered at Utrecht University, which I think shows my students’ enthusiasm for philosophy and the way I teach it:

“Briljante docent; zonder twijfel een van de beste docenten die ik ooit heb gehad” (MA Applied Ethics: Ethical Theory and Moral Practice, Utrecht)

“Wouter Kalf is incredibly competent” (MA Applied Ethics: Ethical Theory and Moral Practice, Utrecht)

“Niets dan lof over de kwaliteiten van Wouter Kalf” (MA Applied Ethics: Ethical Theory and Moral Practice, Utrecht)