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General Teaching Philosophy

So Pleased to Meet You

UC Santa Barbara has many excellent professors and courses, and so I'm grateful to anyone willing to sit in my class over a ten-week quarter. I feel obliged to make my courses as interesting as possible, I enjoy teaching and meeting with students, and I would like to meet each of you at least once in office hours or in some other informal setting. You'll find a comfy chair and a bowl of chocolates in my office, so please come for a visit, stay a little while, and you'd be welcome to discuss whatever you wish.

As much as I've enjoyed talking with each student, I've drafted this essay for all students who are interested in taking a class with me, or for those who are enrolled in one during the current term. This would help my students figure out how best to do well in my classes, and it would also save me the trouble of repeating my general policies several dozen times. And let's be honest: professors are idiosyncratic. Some take attendance, other don't care; some give multiple choice exams, others assign essays; some use I-clickers and Canvas, and others have no idea. I am well-aware that I am a certain kind of college professor, and by laying out clear expectations for you, my dear students, we might avoid needless troubles and misunderstandings. So, I'm Professor Park, and I'm very pleased to meet you.

The Syllabus

Please read it. A good syllabus should state the course objectives right in the first paragraph: "This class is about so and so, some of the subtopics will include this and that, and so the class will be interesting to students who'd like to explore broader themes in thus and such." Now, if you're not remotely interested in so and so, this and that, or thus and such, *it's okay not to take the class*. I know, I know: some of my classes fulfill General Education requirements, you'll need a few classes like this one to graduate, and maybe you'll like my class more than you'd thought. Or maybe you're graduating in a quarter or two and you just don't have a choice. Generally, though, most professors do not like to teach to a student for whom his or her class feels like wheat bread. If you don't like what's on the menu, I won't mind at all if you eat somewhere else. It's a big university, and it's not that hard to find something good for you *and*

more to your liking than what I'm serving. You'll need to decide soon, too: the drop deadline is at the end of the fourth week every term; after that deadline, you're going to get a bill for a lot of wheat bread.

Immigration policy, public law, American ethnic history, status and identity-based discrimination, and Anglo American political philosophy—these topics are like hard, dry wheat bread for some people. Man, they hate it. My dear wife can have a slice now and then, but she can't think of eating that stuff every day, and she chose not to devote her entire professional life to it as I have. And I *have* studied wheat bread for most of my adult life, I still read about wheat bread in my free time, I design courses around wheat bread, I write books and articles about wheat bread, I *love* wheat bread. I can talk about wheat bread for hours. Whereas some people see wheat bread as wheat bread, I experience the same loaves through an infinite variety of textures, colors, and flavors. If you like high-fiber wheat bread as much as I do, I'm your guy. Many students tell me after my classes that they themselves didn't realize how wonderful and marvelous wheat bread could be until they had it with me, and that's felt like a great compliment every time I've heard it. Not every student feels this way, though, but to be fair, I did show them what's on the menu.

Other things on the syllabus are helpful: there's the day, time, and place for the class and for the discussion sections; the location of my office and the phone number there; my email address; the days for each exam, including the final; my office hours; the names and contact info for the teaching assistants; and so on. Please keep all of this handy. There are maybe four or five kinds of questions that I get asked every quarter: "When are your office hours?" "Where is your office?" "What's your email address?" "When is the midterm?" "How much is the midterm worth?" If I had a nickel for every time I've had to answer these kinds of questions, I'd have a trillion nickels. Indeed, the little devil in me has imagined some colorful replies to mix things up: "My office hours are 12 to 2 on Saturday night." "I'm on the tenth floor of HSSB." "My email is chancelloryang@partyschool.edu." "The midterm? Oh, you must have missed it. It was worth 80% of your grade. Sorry!" It's better that you just read the syllabus.

The Readings

The most important sections of the syllabus outline the schedule of readings, and my syllabi are always the same: for a ten-week term, I organize the syllabus into ten sections, and I mean for students to read part I the first week, part II the second week, and so on. (For a six week summer course, the organization and schedule are the same, with only six parts instead of ten.) Each section has a title—something like "The Multiracial State" or "Impossible Subjects." All of the readings assigned for that section deal with themes related to that title in one way or another.

I've tried to explain why my syllabi look the way they do, and I suppose it has something to do with the way albums and tapes used to look and feel before ipods. When I was in high school, kids once made tapes by recording songs off of albums—it sounds pre-historic now, but if you were enamored of someone, or if you were depressed, or if you wanted to share cool bands with your friends, you made a tape. You collected albums with songs having similar themes, then you recorded one by one onto a sixty or ninety minute tape, the kind that goes into a tape deck. (Some of you younger people will have no idea what I'm talking about; for you, it's more like sharing a playlist off of iTunes.) If you chose well, other people would admire your most excellent taste in music, and you would be the bomb.

I spend hours selecting the readings for my classes in much the same way. For each one that I've picked, I've read at least two dozen other things that just didn't make the cut: they were not cool enough, too obtuse, badly written, or interesting to me but likely to bore a twenty-year-old. I pick readings either because they are historically significant, like the essay by the late Senator Edward Kennedy, or they are otherwise outstanding in terms of original research or analysis. I know many of the authors—they are my colleagues, they were my former professors, they are senior scholars in my field, they are great writers, too, and quite often all of these at once.

Almost everything that I've picked has been double-blind peer-reviewed: in the academic world, when a scholar wants to publish an article or a book, he or she submits the thing to an academic publisher. In turn, the publisher removes the author's identity from the work, then sends it to external reviewers, people who are acknowledged experts in their respective fields. This is what we mean by "double-blind review" or "peer review"—the author doesn't get to pick his reviewers, and the reviewers don't know the identity of the author whose work they're reviewing. In this process, the reviewers reject most submissions, either because the research isn't original, they're poorly written, or the analyses are off. Articles accepted for publication are thus a rather narrow subset of academic work—they often *are* quite original, they're well-written, and they contribute to a compelling scholarly or policy debate. Other scholars use and cite the best articles and books numerous times, they appear in syllabi across the disciplines, and they continue to inform the work of other scholars. I love teaching because I get to share and to discuss my favorite works—on my syllabus, my students are getting the latest version of Professor Park's Scholarly Mix Tape.

As a student, your job is to read an article or a book chapter with all of this in mind. What is the academic, policy, or legal debate to which the author is contributing through his or her own work? How did the author acquire and collect the evidence upon which he or she makes her claims? Is his or her analysis of that evidence persuasive, compelling, and original? In short, *why* did the author bother to write this piece, and *why* is this piece important for other persons interested in this same topic? You should also figure out (if it isn't obvious) why I chose a particular article for that specific section of your syllabus, and after reading every article, you

may want to summarize in a paragraph or two what the thing was about, why it was important, and how it fits with the other materials in the class. Doing this exercise will train students to become more attentive, and in time, the sum of all that work will make them much more careful readers. Through their written work, the authors of the readings are "teaching" my own students about a compelling issue, and then adding something new to our thinking about that issue.

Many students, though, read without being aware of this process, without being attentive enough. That is, they "read" in front of loud televisions or stereos, or in the midst of friends, maybe someone they're dating or hoping to date. All of these situations are distracting—they will impede your ability to pay attention to the central arguments of your readings. *I* am prone to this problem: how many times have a read a paragraph or a page, but then have had no idea of what I'd been reading? Consciously reading—being able to have that deeper understanding of what you've been reading—requires effort, perhaps also a certain kind of setting: I would recommend reading in a quiet room, either alone or surrounded by people who are also reading; I would recommend clearing your mind and paying attention to the author. For most of what you're reading, have a pencil handy and take notes. The authors make rather complex arguments about unfamiliar topics, and they often use a vocabulary uncommon in regular conversation. Imagine you run into Emile Durkheim in Isla Vista, and he says to you: "One cannot long remain so absorbed in contemplation of emptiness without being increasingly attracted to it. In vain one bestows on it the name of infinity; this does not change its nature. When one feels such pleasure in non-existence, one's inclination can be completely satisfied only by completely ceasing to exist." Really, Emile, who talks like this? It's profound in its own way, and we hope that he'll cheer up, but such sentences require concentration, and as much effort to read (maybe more) as they were to write.

Reading *does* take effort, but it's also like a lot of other things—the more you do it, the easier it becomes, and the easier it becomes, the less it'll feel like work, and then you'll come to a place where it's quite enjoyable. I myself enjoy reading more than any other intellectual activity, but it took many, many years of effort to get to there. It's like long-distance running: it's painful and miserable at first when you're not in the best shape, but after you keep at it, it gets easier, it gets to feeling pretty good, and then you even look forward to that next run. Those who never run and don't run will have a hard time understanding how anyone can *enjoy* a five or six-mile run; for someone who runs five or six miles for four or five days every week, though, the thought of *not* running is terrible. For an avid runner, a full week off feels awful.

Reading can become a pleasure, but more important than that, reading well is a special magic, it's the simplest and yet the most complex form of communication that human beings have created. When an author writes well, when she writes true, her words can transcend time and space, and she can touch and teach readers that she herself may not have imagined. To give an example, I was a different person after reading the works of Hannah Arendt. She died the same

year that my family came to the United States, when I was five and she was sixty-nine, and I'm sure she wasn't thinking of a Korean American college kid when she was writing *The Origins of Totalitarianism* or *The Human Condition*. These works changed me, and if you read those books now, and then take one of my classes, you'll know what I mean. English was not her first language, nor was it mine, but her writing and my reading, working together like a Wallace Stevens poem, was pure magic. Understanding what she wrote required the lectures of at least four different professors, but when I did understand, it felt like an achievement, as if I could hear her voice.

College is a marathon of reading and of thinking. All students would do well to pace themselves, and to keep up with the readings for each of their classes throughout the term. A*bsolutely do not wait* until the week or day before an exam to get to the assigned chapters and articles. Anyone who does this is as absurd as someone who, having not prepared at all, tries to finish a 26.2-mile race in under three hours. It just ain't going to happen. One of my students came to office hours two days before the final exam, he asked for a copy of the syllabus, then he wanted to know, "So, what's going to be on the test? I haven't done the reading, but I really need to pass your class, and so can you just tell me what the most important readings are?" What to say? Some say that there are no such things as "stupid questions," but I hope that you'll agree that these come close.

The Lectures

Putting together a good lecture is an art, and the masters make it look easy. It isn't: when I started my first job at the University of Texas, I was a total wreck before larger lecture classes—my heart was pounding, I talked way too fast, I broke into a sweat, and all of those fears around public speaking were right there, not to mention the night before and the day after. Just thinking about speaking in front of ten people was enough to stress me out. Nowadays, it's not as big a deal, but only because I've had lots of practice and I've prepared many hours in advance. Also, at Texas and at UCSB, I looked up the professors who'd won distinguished teaching awards, and I sat in their lectures to see how they did it. My goodness, some of the professors here are awesome, and I hope that one day I can be as good as they are now. My own lectures always feel like works in progress, even as I'm far more relaxed and easy when I'm giving them.

For all of my classes, I've designed the lectures so that they'll fit with the readings. If, for example, part VI of the syllabus is about "Immigration Reform, 1980-2000," the lectures for that week will fill out the broader political history of immigration policy and politics during that period, and I'll present a narrative of how leading politicians responded to the powerful economic, social, and international forces that shaped immigration law after 1965. While it's not necessary to do the readings before the same week's lectures, I do think that my students will get

much more out of the presentations if they do just that. (If I'll be talking about themes in part VI on Monday, try to do the readings *before* the Monday of the sixth week.) As you do the readings for that week, questions will come up about this, that, or the other thing—these are often questions that I myself had when I did these readings, or things that I suspected that students wouldn't know prior to the class. In lectures, I'll explain how this, that, and the other relate to what's assigned for that week. By design, lectures will make more sense if you've read ahead, they'll help clarify what you've been assigned.

In 2005, I began using PowerPoint in almost all of my lectures, just because the technology was so cool and because I enjoy sharing images and pictures. I still spend many, many hours preparing for lecture and putting together the PowerPoint presentations, and I've tried to select images and texts that are illuminating for the central themes in the class. My presentations were good enough to steal: a few years ago, another instructor took my lectures off of my password-protected website, slapped his name on them, and thus "thieved" my lectures. I didn't post my presentations online again for years, not until the pandemic, when the world changed so much that these issues now appeared as minor problems. After 2020, I've posted my lectures online again, and you'll find a PDF version of each on our class website. Please, though, I hope that my students and others won't thieve my presentations, that they'll use them only for instructional purposes related to my classes. I would prefer if you didn't repost them everywhere.

The PowerPoint slides should be illustrative and compelling, but they are only part of any lecture. I try to save a great many comments in class for each slide: often, the remarks that I've saved are more important than the photo or picture on the slide itself, and because of this, students ought to attend the lectures in person, even though the slides will be available online. For example, one of my slides contains a photograph of Thurgood Marshall: he is being sworn in as an Associate Justice to the United States Supreme Court in 1967. On the face of it, the image just looks like a guy taking an oath—very blah. What I say in lecture, though, is a lot more interesting: Marshall was the great-grandson of African American slaves, he was described as "light-skinned," suggesting that he had had European ancestors, too, and he was one of the most important attorneys of the 20th century. Marshall had represented the African American plaintiffs in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, one of the most famous and most unpopular decisions in American constitutional law. The guy holding the Bible is Hugo Black, the Supreme Court Justice from Alabama, a former member of the Ku Klux Klan, and a former Senator who had killed bills that would have allowed federal agents to stop the lynching of African Americans in the South. Behind Marshall is Lyndon Johnson, the President from East Texas, the man who had signed both the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Immigration Act of 1965; Johnson, however, was also a man who had dropped the "n" word all the time to refer to black folks. Next to Johnson are Cecilia Suyat Marshall and little Thurgood, Jr. Mrs. Marshall was Filipino-Hawaiian, and so little Thurgood was part European, part African, part Asian, and part Pacific Islander.

The photograph is itself quite ordinary—the story behind the photograph says volumes. It distills an amazing story of how American public law and American politics changed fundamentally between the end of World War II (when white supremacist laws were common) and 1970 (when nearly all of those rules were struck down or repealed). There is a unique social history in the photograph—an interracial marriage, the multiracial child, a ramblin' Texan, and a former Klansman, all captured in an unforgettable moment in American history. Not everyone was thrilled with this picture: for their support of men like Marshall, Johnson and Black received death threats from their (former) white supremacist friends. Indeed, a great many death threats against Hugo Black came from Birmingham, his hometown in Alabama. Johnson himself had acknowledged that because of his support for civil rights legislation, a gigantic fraction of whites would leave the Democratic Party, especially from the South. White supremacists also fumed that Johnson (of all people!) had elevated a "Negro" to the highest Court, and they swore never to vote for another Democrat again. Mr. and Mrs. Marshall were, of course, no strangers themselves to taunts, death threats, and other forms of hostility—Marshall received several credible threats every year, and he and his wife also had a difficult time finding a place to live and picking a school for their boys, these basic choices all complicated by a segregation so pervasive and hateful as to reach into every aspect of their lives. If you come to lecture, you will hear all of this; if you don't, you'll be missing what makes *that* picture worth ten thousand words.

So much of lecture is meant to illuminate through words and pictures. Images help us visualize a theme or a concept, often in ways more memorable than text or speech alone. I think that all of my classes and presentations should have trigger warnings: many images are plain disturbing (people smiling at a lynching); others are funny even as they are racist (Uncle Sam's Thanksgiving, showing the Danish guy eating frog, the Chinese guy eating a rat, the Mexican guy eating watermelon, the Native American guy eating people, the African American guy serving uncooked turkey); many are sad (an American soldier helping an elderly Japanese American woman off a train and into an internment camp, both smiling); and still others are a strange mixture of everything (an advertisement for a poison, showing a Chinese man eating rats, the ad suggesting that the product will work as well as a really hungry Chinese guy). I myself have developed a strange sense of humor by living and working with these disturbing materials for most of my adult life, and so I will also warn you of that tendency as I show you these strange and compelling images. When I started using PowerPoint, just a few images were on-line; nowadays, even the rarest photograph is accessible. I show them because I think it's essential that we *see* what white supremacy and abject forms of racism looked like in the most-so-distant past. As much as the images might be interesting by themselves, I'd advise students to take notes as I unpack the main themes of each lecture *through* the slides and images.

Every lecture has a structure, and every set of lectures has inter-related themes, just like the assigned readings—as students, your job is to understand the central points of each lecture, and to see how they all fit together across the entire course. Again, it's a good idea to take thirty minutes after each class to write down in your own words what I'd just covered. That exercise itself will help you learn to become a more active, attentive listener, and like reading well, you'll find that listening well is a very useful and valuable skill. I have spent many hours preparing each presentation—I've sifted through thousands of images to find just the right ones—and so I will be grateful for your kind attention, for your attentiveness in each class meeting, over the ten-week term.

It's so sad, then, when I can see how some of my students are not paying attention. Literally, I can *see* you: it's not a television show, I can just as easily see you as you can see me. And then there are those many times when I *don't* see you: skipping the lectures is a Really Bad Idea. Still, it's more rational in a way than coming to class and not paying attention. Inattentiveness can take so many forms: in one class meeting, when I was talking about the Holocaust and its impact on refugee law in the United States, I had a picture of Auschwitz projected onto the screen. A student in one corner of the room started laughing behind his laptop, and he stopped himself after thirty seconds or so, embarrassed, as we all stared at him. A few of his classmates looked as though they'd like to punch him. The dorky laugher had been on YouTube, tuned to a clip from that MTV show, *Jackass*. I'm sure it was funny, but it wasn't funny. He had made himself look like a jackass, and even as he apologized to me and to his classmates, we all remembered him for his jackassery for the rest of the term. Please, if you want to watch videos, television, or the highlights from Monday Night Football, or if you want to play solitaire, read the newspaper, talk with your friends, text, call, or break up with your significant other, or if you want to sleep off a hangover, a sleep over, or beer pong, don't do it in my lecture, or in anyone's lecture. Sleeping is especially puzzling: as to why anyone would get up early, shuffle off to a morning lecture, then drool asleep in the lecture itself—this is still beyond me. It's so irrational, not to mention rude.

Imagine if you were to invite me to meet you and your parents for dinner at your apartment, the one you'd spent hours cleaning, and you've been shopping and picking the finest ingredients and cooking all day and getting everything ready, and then I show up late, after a five-mile run, and I plop my sweaty butt on your couch, I crack open a beer, and I ignore you and your lovely parents, and I text and call some friends and I flip on *Jackass* and laugh my a** off while dinner gets cold, and I'm not even eating *your* food because I'm ordering Woodstock's. Maybe I'll fall asleep, too, because, I'm, like, tired. Your parents would not have a good impression of me, and you yourself will regret that you'd ever extended the invitation. And then how might you feel if you'd invited me to dinner and I didn't show up at all? What if that happened again and again? I wonder which form of jackassery might be worse, being rude in your presence or a string of serial absences?

Once again, please, if you're going to have trouble paying attention in lecture, it's okay if you stay home. I don't take attendance in the large lecture class. No one has to see you behaving like a jackass there, and you might also save yourself a great deal of embarrassment. And if you find that you keep missing class, that fourth week drop deadline is a good idea.

The Discussion Sections

The same approach goes for discussion sections. Advanced graduate students run these fifty minute meetings once every week for students enrolled in the lower-division courses, and they offer important occasions to clarify themes and ideas presented in either the readings or the lectures. I ask my graduate student teaching assistants to attend all of the lectures, to complete all of the assigned reading, and to keep up with the class so that they can also help you do the same.

In my own meetings with the teaching assistants, I suggest topics for discussion that might help you relate what you're learning in class with on-going debates in the real world. If we're talking about late 19th and early 20th century Western colonialism in the Philippines, for instance, I might suggest that you discuss the wisdom or necessity of having American troops and advisers now in other countries, whether in the Middle East, Asia, or Europe. If the week's materials are about undocumented aliens, perhaps you'll discuss the proper legal and moral obligations you might have when you yourself "discover" someone out of status, either through work, or in school, or in some other setting. If pitched well, discussion sections allow students to "try out" various concepts from the class, so that they can arrive at considered, thoughtful judgments about what they've been reading and hearing.

The teaching assistant's job, however, is *not* to summarize the readings for you, nor to repeat what I'd said in lecture—discussion sections should never be (nor can they be) substitutes for the readings and lectures. Students who attend discussion sections without having gone to lecture or having done the readings are a special variety of annoying. I say this having myself been a TA: students who were disengaged and yet expected me to summarize everything were very irritating. They're like people who go to a Book Club meeting without having read the book. And there may also be a special ring of hell for people who don't know what they're talking about, and yet can't stop talking, they want to talk all the time, rudely, over other people and out of turn, as if afflicted with a case of verbal diarrhea. Before talking in sections, think, and while it's okay to have an opinion, try first to be well-informed *before* you offer it.

To that end, I've arranged for my lower division class to have sections after all of the lectures for the week have concluded, thus giving students an ample opportunity to keep up with their

readings. If you intend to go to discussion sections, please do the readings, please bring your lecture notes, and please plan to participate in an intelligent discussion with your peers about the material. A discussion section can be a place where you hear perspectives that you'd not considered, or where you can clarify things that were confusing. They are also terrific places to form study groups and to share ideas from the class in even smaller meetings that you can schedule yourself, especially before the midterms and finals. A study group is a special gift you can give one another: I don't think you can know a concept unless you're able to explain it to someone else. That's what discussions are all about.

To make sure that sections are well-led, I almost always select graduate student teaching assistants who have had some experience in the classroom. If they don't have teaching experience, they have some other overwhelming positive in their favor: they have a master's degree already; they are almost finished with their doctorates; or their faculty advisors tell them to establish some teaching record to supplement their outstanding research productivity. I've had some amazing teaching assistants, many of whom have gone on to finish their Ph.D.s and become professors themselves. An excellent teaching assistant makes my job so much easier and your experience so much better—by being prepared, by being available to students in office hours or in the discussion sections, they make my life less exhausting, and they can enhance the quality of the large lecture classes. Please be nice to them.

Also, for Asian American Studies 2, I've offered an honors section for the past few years. This discussion section is capped at twenty people, and it's for students enrolled in the Honors Program in the College of Letters and Science, although I can also add anyone with a special interest in the class. For many students, the thought of a smallish discussion section with the professor can be scary, and yet the whole point of the Honors Program is to make college feel less scary, by introducing students to their professors, and by giving them more occasions to get to know one another. This is a large research university, but the honors sections—like the other discussion sections—help us feel more like a small liberal arts college. In this face-to-face setting, I've gotten many fantastic, interesting questions, and I've heard some of the best conversations about immigration law and policy among people of any age. At first, I did the honors sections as a favor to the College—nowadays, I do them because it's delightful to meet with a small group of students while I'm teaching the big lecture class. If you're feeling nerdy this term, please let me know, and we can see about adding you to this honors section. Students in the honors section are required to write a short paper about the class, but that can be about anything related to the class, and the nerdiest students have liked doing it.

The Essay Exams and Grading

Grading is a chore and the least enjoyable part of being a professor. I know no professor who enjoys it: "I love grading fifty essay exams!" said no teaching assistant ever. We would much

rather present polished lectures and offer stimulating readings to a group of people without having to make judgments about the level of attention they were paying to our talking and sharing. Grading seems another symptom of the times in which we live, where all things must be measured, assessed, compared, "evaluated." To all of my students, I am (almost) sorry to have to give you grades. To the ones who will ace my classes, thank you so much for paying attention, and please stick around until the end of this essay to see what prizes you've won. To the ones who won't or didn't do so hot, it's too bad things didn't work out, and I'm so sorry for flunking you.

Grading is an unfortunate reality with which we must all contend at the University, but to keep things as professional, as fair, and as objective as possible, I've tried to stick to the following guidelines and principles. First of all, nothing on my exams should come as a surprise to a student who has prepared in advance. Exams shouldn't test the trivial, or require from memory facts that any reasonable person might forget after the class has ended, nor cover materials not covered in the class. I won't ask for your knowledge of obscure dates or other facts, and prior to the exams, I will announce in class which portions of the syllabus and which lectures will be covered. All of the essay questions should require students to integrate important concepts and analyses that were central in either readings, lectures, or both; a good exam question should invite a student to demonstrate his or her mastery of the topic. A flat, stale, vague essay answer might yield a passing grade (barely), but if a student wants to ace the exam, he or she must demonstrate mastery over two or three different topics on any given exam.

To give you a sense of the exam itself, about seven to ten days before, I will post sample essay questions on-line at the class website. These sample questions will cover most (but not all) of the substantive areas that will be on the exam, such that if you can answer these sample questions thoroughly and accurately, *and* if you can anticipate similar types of questions about related topics and readings, you should do fine on the exam. To make sure you're approaching the material in the right way, you may want to write a sample answer for one or more of the sample essay questions; show me or your teaching assistants, and we can give you suggestions for improvement, or at least confirm that you're on the right track. Most first drafts (of anything) are not very good—they're very far from excellent, and so it's a good idea to practice rather than trying to fumble into mastery on the day of the exam. Indeed, during some in-class exams, I can see students who have a puzzled, dazed expression, unsure of how to proceed, and yet nothing on the exam should seem so mysterious. To enhance your chances further, on all of the essay exams, students can expect some choice over the questions asked. For example, for a midterm exam, you will see three questions, but you will have to answer only two. Despite all of this, it may be inevitable that I will continue to have students who are puzzled and dazed, even as I'm pretty sure now that that's not my bad. Again, I'm so sorry for flunking you.

Once the exams are finished, the grading begins, and over the years, I've relied on the following process. Before grading, I "turn over" the first page of all the bluebooks so that I don't know the identity of anyone I'm grading. (Even jackasses deserve objectivity.) I read a very large sample of the exams once without marking any exam to get a sense of how all students responded to the questions. I read *all* the exams a second time, and then place them in four or five stacks. Then I read them for a third and final time, putting them in order from best to worst. In this way, I will read every exam more than once, and each student's grade will reflect the student's performance with respect to the performance of his or her peers in the class. If the exam is well-designed, and if the clear majority of students responded as I'd expected to each question, the average scores for all the exams falls within a B-/C+ range, and the grading spread for the exams resembles a standard bell curve. I instruct my teaching assistants to follow this method to grade their own stack of exams. For the lower division classes, I grade about a fourth of all the exams, just to get a feel for how the class is doing. So that you know how you're doing, we try to have the graded exams back to you within one week.

On occasion, as with anything, I do make errors when grading, and so I am open to students who would like to appeal their grades. However, when a student wishes for another "read" of his or her exam, the student must make a formal request in writing, and the student must also state why he or she feels that there was an error. In addition, all students who appeal their grades should know that the grade may rise or fall; that is, there is no guarantee that an appeal may raise your grade, and there is some risk that it might decrease it. Still, students should know that this option is available. If you ask me to review your exam, it may be about the third or fourth time that I'll have read the thing, so please, make a good argument for why you believe there was an error.

Overall, about ten to fifteen percent of my students in the lower division classes have gotten an A, a similar fraction get a B, most students pass, and about ten to fifteen percent fail. In the upper division classes, about the same fraction get an A, a few more get a B, most pass, and about five percent fail. As of this writing, I've been a professor for over twenty years, and these grading outcomes have remained consistent.

In all of my upper division classes, students may write a final paper instead of taking one or more of the essay exams. Students who would like this option should talk to me before the end of the third week of the term, and they should submit a detailed abstract or outline for their project by the end of the fifth week. This option is useful for students who need a polished writing sample, either for a first job after college, or for a graduate school application. Indeed, most elite professional and graduate schools require applicants to submit a writing sample to demonstrate evidence of excellent writing skills.

If you're writing a paper, though, don't plagiarize. Plagiarism is ripping off someone's work and passing it off as your own. It's a bad thing. Don't do it. I will know. I will check

automatically, and my own colleagues at this fine University, in Computer Science and in Political Science, have mastered the techniques through which many dishonest students across the country have been caught. If you google for "An Automated System for Plagiarism Detection Using the Internet," you'll find both a description of this pervasive problem, as well as the technology used to handle it. The system has evolved to account for, and to detect, AI robots, chatbots, and other "smart" algorithms. Again, don't do it, don't use these things in settings where professors expect original student work; bad things will happen to you if you rip off other peoples' things and pass it off as your own. A record of your wrongdoing will follow you all the days of your college career, and your professors will treat you like Hester with a scarlet "P" for Plagiarist.

On the other hand, if you do write an excellent, original paper, if you spend a good deal of time choosing your words, arranging the sentences and paragraphs just so, and engaging other complex scholarly works—these are the penultimate skills for scholars in the social sciences and the humanities. Writing is that other end of the reading magic: do it well and you can "speak" to people still unborn, you can teach them valuable lessons through space and time, and you may leave an impression of your best self long after your last breath. You'll also get better grades. It's such a valuable skill, perhaps the most important skill that you can practice in college. Unfortunately, because writing is such a difficult, time-consuming skill to teach and an even harder one to master, students don't do as much as they should in high school or in college. Among professors, good writing is the skill we see the least among our students, and the one we want someone else to teach the most. It's tough, getting through bad writing. If you wish to practice, though, if you need the practice, then let me know and we'll work something out.

Reading well, listening well, speaking well, writing well—whatever you end up doing after college, it'll be a variant of what you're learning to do in college. In the "real" world, in most professional settings, employees are reading and digesting lots of information, figuring out patterns in the data, analyzing what it means and how it might be consequential, and then communicating all of that in writing and in speech to other people. Some say that college is not like the real world, but you'd be surprised how, in fact, it *is* like the real world: in a real job, if you come to work hung over from too much beer pong, if you fall asleep at staff meetings, if you don't show up to staff meetings, if you're rude and say idiotic things at staff meetings, if you have verbal diarrhea, if you don't get your work assignments done, if you keep relying on others to tell you what you should be doing yourself, if you rip off other people's work, and if you don't do a competent job when you are working, then you will be fired. Most of your supervisors won't feel badly at all that they've flunked out of their organizations. Indeed, I know many who take pleasure in firing the incompetent, the rude, the lazy, or the inattentive jackass, and if you've been working or sitting next to one, you, too, might want to go out for drinks on Friday after such a person gets booted. In that light, please note that developing good, honest work habits now will get you much further in life than if you treat college as a place to avoid work.

Don't avoid work, for if you *do* perform your work well, in competent, honest, consistent, and beautiful ways, over many projects, many classes, and many terms, your future *after* college will be much brighter indeed.

Other Observations and Some Incentives

In this essay, I've given several examples of students who are annoying, the ones who don't read the syllabus, students who aren't interested in the class but enroll anyway, then don't pay attention, the students who goof off, don't or won't read, and people who then write exams that offer solid evidence of their inattentiveness and goofiness. A few exams are so bad that they're kind of funny: one student wrote on his exam "I have no idea!" which made this among the funniest, most memorable, and easiest to grade. It's not funny in the end: I've also seen students cheating on exams, several who've plagiarized, and still others who can't seem to stop such behavior, then flunk often, and thus have been dismissed from UCSB. I assure you, though, that these are not the majority of my students. They're a tiny and sadder fraction, and I'm also inclined to think that it's a shrinking fraction. If UCSB is like a fine restaurant, it's become much harder to get a table these days. We turn away over half of the people who want to eat here, and we have no problems dismissing the rudest patrons, and then admitting others who have better appetites and better manners.

Aside from a few annoying students, there is another significant fraction of young people who aren't paying attention to academic work, but they have very understandable reasons for being distracted. In a population of over 23,000 undergraduates, bad things are bound to happen: some students come to college while having to manage an illness or disability, either a psychological condition, a medical condition, or both; some people get sick, most for a short time, but others do become ill permanently due to an accident or other misfortune. Some students have parents who divorce; others have parents who lose their jobs, sometimes their homes, sometimes everything; and still others must cope with a range of profound changes in their families, including illnesses and the deaths of loved ones. Barely visible and invisible things can also derail days and weeks, including bedbugs, influenza, and now COVID. In all these circumstances, I can understand why a student may have trouble concentrating on parts IV through VI for the second midterm.

If something bad happens to you or to your loved ones while you're enrolled in my class, please let me know. We can explore various ways to deal with any emergency that may arise during the course of a term, but unless you tell me, I won't know, and if I don't know, I won't know to offer help. This University has an entire division dedicated to supporting students, and so if I can't help you myself, I can find someone who can. The Division of Student Affairs tells all incoming students about its wide range of services, but the most important message might be the one about being proactive when something bad happens. Don't wait until your grades slip, or until you end

up on academic probation or dismissed from the University. Whether you need Student Health, Counseling Services, or Campus Learning Assistance Services, take advantage of these resources early so that the academic performance recorded on your transcript reflects your skill and hard work when you've been at your best. If you need a break from school, take it; in the fullness of time, when you are my age, no one will ask, know, or care that you took a quarter or a year to figure out some issues that were serious and distracting. Some problems take time.

Perhaps because I've met so many students who've suffered distress of one kind or another, I've come to appreciate how academic success, like all success, does depend on a fortuitous set of circumstances. A lot of it is just plain luck. A person's success is never an individual effort—there is no such thing as a "self-made man" or a "self-made woman." People who've enjoyed academic or professional success can point to dozens of other people who've loved, supported, nurtured, and sacrificed for them, and it's hard to say that they "deserved" any of that. Such support was often a gift, which of its very nature is always undeserved, and such gifts should elicit gratitude above all else. Around the eighth week of the quarter, when we discuss the migration of highly skilled workers in part VIII of Asian American Studies 2, I will ask my students to imagine the amount of money their parents and other loved ones have spent on them from the time of their birth to the present moment, and then to consider how that figure might vary by family income and circumstance, both among their peers in the classroom, as well as among their peers all over the world.

It doesn't take a genius to see why most successful college graduates are still from affluent families in post-industrial countries, that they are members of a certain class, the offspring of a teeny-tiny fraction of people who can afford a world-class education within a much wider world where most struggle just to survive. Even for students who aren't of affluent backgrounds, their success often depended even more on a wider network of people who've supported, loved, and helped them. I once thought I was a "disadvantaged" student because I'd grown up in a working class family; without scholarships, college wouldn't have been possible for me. But I had other tremendous advantages: my mother loved me fiercely and my older brother looked out for me constantly. One or both would tell me every day that I was a great kid, that I was smart, that I could do well in college and after. Excellent teachers also went out of their way to help me, and great, learned professors said, in kind tones, that I needed more work here, more attention there. For years, I have been reading the transformative works of scholars, artists, and thinkers who are no longer with us, there are too many to name here, and yet I owe them also such a deep sense of gratitude. My own writing from my first year in college is almost too painful to revisit—it's so obvious that I was not naturally talented, and equally obvious that whatever skill I may have now was cultivated with love and with care, that it was the result of hard work from many, many kind and gracious people.

A college education is such a privilege. At its best, such an education changes us, it can alter the way we see ourselves in the world. For the best students, college is a thrilling, upsetting, destabilizing, and mind-blowing experience all at once, and I've been lucky that most of my students have been so wonderful and so amazing. It's hard to imagine a more gratifying profession than professor. It happens in small ways: a few students write exams and papers that are outstanding—they are so good that they make even grading a pleasure. In an honors seminar, when I'd assigned a seven-page paper, a young woman turned in a twenty-page, elegant piece of analysis and research that made *me* want to take *her* class. In another lower division class, the student who had the highest overall score was a seventeen year-old first-year student—I couldn't believe it. I read her exams several times, and thus came to the irrefutable conclusion that she indeed had a Very Large Brain. If she was like this at seventeen, holy cow, watch out. I feel so grateful to students who've devoted a substantial amount of time to readings and to lectures, and when one of these students takes another class with me, I am a happy man. From my prospective, these smart, motivated young people are as magnificent as a sunrise, they are a pleasure to know.

It's all the more impressive because college can be so distracting, maybe more so now than when I was in school. Two decades ago, phones weren't smart, only science professors and government officials used an "internet," and there was a thing called facebook, but it wasn't a verb, and no one spent hours there. Only birds tweeted back in my day. Because I have my own children now, I wish a few things didn't exist at all, like Snapchat and Tinder. Oh, I tell my daughters that we had movies in 1990, but we didn't have Netflix or Hulu or HBO or YouTube, these things that threaten to stream away my time and theirs every night. Plus, I didn't go to college in Santa Barbara: the sheer beauty of this place is just always distracting. When I first got here, *I* had a hard time working.

I know it's tough. Really, I do. Demonstrating excellence and mastery over sixteen units in ten weeks in near perfect weather while surrounded by attractive people of your own age all connected through social media near beaches and surfing—well, this requires exceptional levels attentiveness. It requires a combination of talent and of discipline not common to people anywhere. Students who can do this deserve a lot more than chocolate. And so, in addition to the chocolate in my office, I've felt compelled to provide other incentives for students to do well in my classes. As a sign of respect, the student who gets the top score in my lower division class will get a thank you note and an invitation for lunch with me and with his or her teaching assistant. If a student aces any two of my classes, I will offer to write a recommendation letter on the student's behalf for any prospective employer, or to a graduate program of his or her choice. If a student aces three or more of my classes, I will offer a much more detailed and elaborate letter, perhaps even send a copy to his or her parents. Students who do well in college deserve to be supported in every way possible, and if that turns out to be you, I will be pleased to sing your praises.

As a professor, I am most proud of the wonderful things that my students have done after UCSB. Several of them have gone on to earn doctorates, law degrees, and other graduate degrees, and from places like UCLA, USC, UCSB, Davis, Stanford, Hastings, Irvine, Penn, Wisconsin, Caltech, Chicago, Berkeley, and Harvard. One of my favorite students won a Fulbright for a year abroad in China, another was getting a doctorate at Michigan. Some of my students were the first in their families to finish college, they've won hundreds of thousands of dollars in scholarships for graduate studies. Come to my office, younger students, look at the notes outside my office door, and *marvel*. The experiences of my best students reveal an obvious truth: excellent students can turn their good grades into cold cash money, and by making the most of every opportunity, they earned many more opportunities. There are other obvious benefits: many graduates of UCSB go on to complete professional degrees, and they make a decent living through fulfilling forms of work, as they manage big companies, government agencies, school districts, and other complex organizations. Many students who don't go on to graduate school right away do quite well, too: some are in the corporate world, others establish or work in non-profits, and still others are moms and dads now, juggling career and family just like me.

Teaching is not about me. Teaching is about you, and for me, it's wonderful to contribute some small measure to your education. It's rewarding not because I happen to like recognizing and celebrating outstanding achievements (although I do), but more because our society and our world have some heinous, intractable problems, ones that require smart, dedicated young people to work really, really hard to solve. Some problems are so heinous that they may *never* be solved, but I believe now more than ever that the best chance for our collective future lies within the geeky, dorky, nerdy, hard-working young people that I see every term. The ones who've gone to graduate school have discovered their own version of wheat bread, and I hope that their work will bring us all to a healthier, better place. Even if you don't use your superpowers to save the world, it's comforting to know that you will have become more reliable, more thoughtful, and more informed for having been through this place than had you not come at all.

My former students send me wedding invitations, pictures of their new babies, sad and happy news about their families, and lots and lots of holiday cards. They send thank you notes, too, but the not-so-big secret is that I am thankful for being a part of their lives. I've so enjoyed meeting their families at graduation, if just to thank and to congratulate them for the wonderful people that they've loved and supported for much longer than I have. Thinking about my students now makes me feel blessed all over again. They're the reasons why I love teaching, why I look forward to every academic year, and why I am so very, very pleased to meet you.