

## **Student comments- PHIL 411: Time & Space (Spring 2017)**

The comments provided below are complete and unedited (except when needed to protect anonymity).

-this was a great class. My favorite i've ever taken. 1/1

-I'm a freshman and since I got to Duke I was sure I wanted to major in neuroscience. I wasn't sure if I wanted to minor in Literature, Psychology, Visual Arts or Philosophy. After taking your class this semester I've decided to minor in Philosophy and couldn't be more excited to keep on taking philosophy classes at Duke. Next semester I'm taking a class called Philosophy and Literature with Professor Alessandro Gatti, the syllabus looks amazing and although its a very different type of philosophy from the one we worked with in your class I can't wait. Finally, I feel like I should admit that your class made me experience something I'd never felt before. About three times this semester I felt like I had reached my maximum cognitive capacity, I sat down, and simply told myself (or whoever was around me), "I simply do not have the brainpower for this". Trust me, I've been mind-blown in a few classes, I've had epiphanies reading articles and dissertations, and I've gotten stuck in mental reveries after certain conversations, but I've never felt that I simply cannot "think that far". Your class pushed me to this level and honestly made me feel deeply hopeless and inadequate for some periods of time. But this isn't negative in any way (because I eventually figured it out, whatever it was that stunted me at the moment), this type of experience is what assures me that I'm not settling and that I am pushing myself, finding my limits and surpassing them, and really just trying to become a better thinker. I chase the moments where I can push my mental boundaries further and further. So thank you for all you have done for me, my future and my thoughts.

-I feel like filling in bubbles does not justify how good this class was and the difference I think it has made in my career path! Thank you so much for being such an amazing and passionate teacher!

-This class was beyond interesting for me, and the ability of comfortably discussing topics on time and space have broadened my understanding of the world, and allowed me to expand from within me to a state in which I feel closer to the full understanding I have always aimed at learning. Thank you so much for teaching this class, I am aware that I have not been the most attentive student, but I have learned a lot, and I don't think I could have learned such beautiful concepts without this class. I deeply appreciate it.

-I had never taken a philosophy class before, and I was worrying as to whether I could understand a 400-level philosophy course. This class constantly bent my mind and thought patterns into thinking abstract topics that we all take as given (i.e. perception of space and time). Initially, I had a hard time writing/explaining my thoughts clearly. But, as the semester progressed, I started seeing the beauty (the tip of the iceberg) of philosophical thinking and felt like I understood the notion of space & time much better than I could have with a scientific point of view. The topics and assignments taught me a lot (about existence and life), and also broadened my perspective, and I cannot explain how grateful I am to have taken this class from you.

-Dr. Smithson is a great professor. Not only is he extremely knowledgeable about the

subjects we covered, but he also had a great sense for what the class did and did not understand. I have never seen a professor so engaged in the questions of the students. He truly did treat everyone in the class as an equal and would fully listen to each question and come up with a thoughtful response. Moreover, he promoted a great classroom culture where each student felt comfortable asking questions.

-Dr. Smithson was a wonderful instructor and genuinely made every class entertaining. Almost every class I found myself laughing at least once, because he is so good at improvising stories/comedy whenever he senses a lull in attention. Couldn't really ask for more out of a professor teaching this.

-I think there could be more concrete outlines provided to students that allow for a better handle of the material. The material can get quite abstract relatively quickly, and it's easy to lose sight of the general themes in the swamp of the small details. Dr. Smithson is incredibly well prepared and enthusiastic about the course.

-I wish I could take more classes from Professor Smithson at Duke. He was extremely engaging, thoughtful, and knowledgeable about this difficult subject matter. I was never able to meet with him during scheduled office hours due to conflicts with another class, but he was always willing to meet with me at other times. He was excellent at responding to emails, giving detailed feedback, and generally being accommodating. He had excellent handouts detailing the main ideas of all of the different units of the class that elucidated the difficult readings. I am sincerely envious of students who will take other classes with Professor Smithson in the future – he was absolutely fantastic.

-One of the best instructors I've had at Duke, hands down. He was constantly engaged and enthusiastic, and though the topics we covered were heavy (particularly at the end of the semester), he did an awesome job of keeping class discussing entertaining and humorous. His grading was fairly difficult on the papers, but I can tell he is incredibly invested in the learning of his students, and is more than willing to meet with each and every student outside of class to make sure they understand the material. The only thing I would say I wish had been done differently was that the course seemed pretty backloaded—we had a lot of assignments and papers and difficult material at the end of the course, when most students are already feeling burned out.

-Probably the best teacher I've had at Duke.

-Professor Smithson did a really great job at creating a class environment that was stimulating and open to discussion. He explained difficult concepts well and was good about fairly discussing all points of view. He was somewhat disorganized at times. Overall I really enjoyed the class with him though.

-Professor Smithson was easily the most enthusiastic and engaging professor that I have had at Duke. You can tell that he is genuinely interested in the subject matter, and he takes his time to make sure everyone understands new concepts. I can definitely say that I have never been bored in his class. He has a wide breadth of knowledge on the subject matter, and is more than willing to help students outside of class time. I would recommend Professor Smithson to anyone even remotely interested in the class's subject matter.

-Robert Smithson uses humor to engage students. He is also very receptive to questions and tries his best to foster conversation among the students. The class dynamic was amazing and Professor [Smithson] made this one of my best classes taken at Duke.

-This professor is the bomb. Very funny and engaging. One of my favorite professors so

far.