

Assoc Prof Philip Holden

Department of English Language and Literature



Assoc Prof Philip Holden has been the recipient of numerous awards for teaching over the years from the Faculty Teaching Excellence Awards to the Outstanding Educator Award. It is easy to see why this has been the case. The four modules he teaches: EN2101E: Literary Appreciation and Criticism, EN3269: Southeast Asian Literatures in English, EN3262: Postcolonial Literatures in English and EN5231: Asian and Other Modernities, have been put together with an extreme care and thoroughness, and Assoc Prof Holden's student feedback is full of praise for the clarity of his teaching and his ability to engage and hold the students' interest and attention, as well as his ability to stimulate critical thinking.

Assoc Prof Holden's teaching balances guidance with flexibility and autonomy. His Teaching Statement says that his methodologies are 'there to empower students'; rather than aiming at fulfilling some particular 'higher level outcome', his aim is to allow students to 'create their own outcomes from what is at hand within a defined field.' He provides comprehensive frameworks for students in each module, giving them a set of readings and questions which they have to think about before each teaching session, and assessment is so structured as to provide both a sense of closure to each component of the module, as well as, to the students, a continuous sense of where they are, both with regard to the module and to their own learning. That his pedagogical methods provide the sense of guidance he intends them to may be attested to by the student who writes that 'this creates a sense of security for the student for s/he knows that the material is being taught according to a certain progression.' That they also facilitate independent thinking may be attested to by the postgraduate student who writes that '... he encourages us to go beyond the curriculum and explore things on our own and never ... makes us seem like anything less than mature, independent, thinking postgraduate students.'

Assoc Prof Holden's teaching also manages to balance the needs of theory and practice. One of the modules he teaches, EN3269, is a demanding module in which students have to read, side by side with their primary texts, theoretical material which they are required to apply to those primary texts. This not only forces the students to become aware of exactly what they understand of the theory (as one can't apply what one doesn't understand), hence facilitating Assoc Prof Holden's intention of making the students more self-aware about their own learning, but also results in knowledge that is reinforced through practice. The connection between the practical and theoretical in Assoc Prof Holden's teaching also manifests in other ways, for example the off-campus trips to areas of Singapore where abstract questions of how communities might imagine space might find a grounding and realization in the contemplation and inhabiting of actual environments, e.g. Little India.

Assoc Prof Holden's dedication to his students is evident, not merely from the student feedback which constantly refers to his patience and readiness to answer questions, his readiness to help them even with projects not associated with his own modules, but also in the level of detail to which he is prepared to go in giving feedback to the students on their work, as seen in the sample emails to his students. His strengths as a teacher are many and may perhaps be summed up in the words of the student who writes: 'This is the work of an outstanding educator – someone who possesses much and imparts much as well.'