More than the sum of its parts: compact preference representation over combinatorial domains
Uckelman, J.D.

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The first person I wish to thank is someone I can’t identify by name: whomever wrote the course description for my high school’s freshman speech class. This course description was so frightening for someone who disliked public speaking as much as I did that I decided to fulfill the speech requirement the only other way possible—by joining the debate team. Somehow it escaped me that this was not a clever way to evade the requirement; instead of giving five speeches in a one-quarter course, I spent every fall and winter Saturday giving speeches... and kept doing it for three more years, long after I’d fulfilled the requirement. Our coach, Bob Galligan, (who possibly wrote the scary course description) introduced me to philosophy, and debate was what convinced me to major in philosophy at Iowa State University.

In my second semester at Iowa State, I had the good fortune of taking the introductory logic course from Bill Robinson. We did natural deduction for propositional and quantifier logic, with one lecture at the end on modal logic. I was hooked, and Prof. Robinson graciously offered to do an independent study course with me on modal logic the next semester. Later, he (and my friend, Josh Kortbein) encouraged me take the two-semester mathematical logic course offered by the math department, which put me on the path to becoming a logician. Roger Maddux’s math logic course opened my eyes to how much I didn’t know. I’m grateful that Prof. Maddux took into account that I was a non-mathematician, since with my background at the time, the work was quite hard for me. It was in his course that I first understood how to prove anything, a skill without which I’d have no dissertation. (Prof. Maddux also started me, unbeknownst to him, on my habit of hoarding scratch paper on which to do proofs.)

My advisor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Mike Byrd, deserves special thanks, on four counts: First, he showed me the best example I have ever seen of how to teach. Mike drew in even the students who didn’t want to be there, not by gimmicks or by watering down the material, but by sheer force of enthusiasm. As we walked to the first lecture of his introductory logic course
(for which I was several times his TA), he remarked to me in his matter-of-fact way, “This is the seventieth time I’ve taught this course”, and smiled. Mike set an inspiring example. Second, Mike didn’t just tell me when I’d made a mistake, he showed me exactly where and gave me a counterexample. I’ve always been grateful for his dedication to providing feedback; it helped me to mind the details, in a field where details are everything. Third, Mike did all this at a difficult time in his life, when no one would have blamed him for having his mind on matters other than his students. Finally, Mike suggested that I apply to Amsterdam, which is how I came to be at the ILLC.

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