

November 3, 2016

Colleagues:

As a Teaching Excellence Award winner serving as Faculty Fellow with the George Mason University Center for Teaching and Faculty, I am afforded the opportunity to serve as an evaluator for faculty and graduate student course design and teaching. In this capacity, I observed Mr. Eric Hammer's Economics 385 International Economic Policy course on November 2, 2016.

Based on the syllabus, the class was scheduled to discuss international poverty, foreign aid, and development planning in developing nations. Mr. Hammer had given an exam during the previous class and began the class by distributing the graded exams to students who had not yet retrieved their exams from him outside of class. As the class meets once per week, this suggests that Mr. Hammer had a rapid turnaround time on the exam and was prepared to meet with students outside of classtime in order to provide feedback on their learning as noted through the testing evaluation.

Class began on time with Mr. Hammer presenting a general overview of what would be discussed during the day's meeting. He began with a powerpoint presentation that reflected images of poverty across different countries with varying levels of GDP per capita. The list of select countries ranked by GDP per capita, the images, and the experiences of the people in the countries depicted provided the backdrop for the days discussion on relative poverty. Challenges in the implementation of development policy were framed around the extent to which individuals and communities were collaborative or competitive based on their level of industrialization. Through an innovative modification of the Socratic method, Mr. Hammer was able to elicit a nuanced timeline of how societies develop and the effects that development has on individuals and communities over time. He had obviously developed rapport with the students as they were comfortable "speaking in spew draft", that is, providing responses to his questions that were not yet fully formed. Mr. Hammer allowed students space to wrestle with ideas, connecting answers to his questions back to previous class discussions, to other students' answers, and eventually, to the evolving timeline on the board. Mr. Hammer blended a formal lecture style with the deployment of pointed questions to students in a seamless manner that made it easy for students to follow, take notes, and ask clarifying questions.

I also evaluated the course syllabus and handouts for the students. The materials provided to students were clearly written with the goal of inviting the students into a conversation. This invitation to participate permeated the class, beginning with the syllabus and including the blended teaching methods utilized in the class period I evaluated. Given the subject matter and the time of the class (a once a week class at 7:20p), I was surprised at the extent to which students accepted this invitation to join in the conversation. Students demonstrated learning through referencing previous class material and the exam that had just been completed and applied the concepts presented earlier in the class period to each new scenario proffered for discussion.

The assignment for the next class was for students to listen to a series of podcasts designed to be heard as a conversation among economists around issues of economic development and development planning. Mr. Hammer prefaced this assignment during the class by encouraging students to be prepared to talk about how the “lecturers” would likely respond to issues of the value of providing development aid in differing forms (to include changing employment regulations and designating a minimum wage). This assignment is another example of inviting students into the conversation. Expert conversations around contemporary events provided a starting point for their next set of in-class conversations, leaving students with the expectation that their viewpoint was valued and valuable in the contemporary economic conversation.

Mr. Hammer skillfully uses techniques for teaching that are consistent with his discipline, connecting with students and their own lives as he invites them into contemporary conversations around economics, development, and policy decisions. I was impressed by his course design, his preparation, his classroom presence, and his ability to connect with his students.

Please feel free to contact me at any time about this evaluation of Mr. Eric Hammer’s teaching.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shannon N. Davis". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "S".

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