

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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Subject: Formative peer review of teaching – Dr. Tracy L. Friedel

As a colleague in the University's Faculty Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Certificate Leadership Program, I was asked to review Dr. Friedel's teaching. My review is based on the following elements:

- Her detailed course syllabus
- A one hour observation of her during class
- A pre-visit information folio
- Handouts from the class session.

"Theory and Dimensions of Place-based Learning: Ecohumanist, Critical and Indigenous Lenses" is a post-graduate seminar in the Faculty of Education's Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy. Community-service learning (CSL) is an integral aspect of this course (two students placed in each CSL location. As a result, class sessions some weeks are cancelled in lieu of other individual and collective learning activities.

The course is design to maximize learner participation. Students lead portions of many sessions, small group work is embedded in some sessions, and there are some "learning trips".

Assessment

There are three summatively assessed learning activities: a "composting assignment", where students aggregate their thoughts, reflections, readings, or anything else that demonstrates students' "connected thinking" about the course topic and one's self; a student-led discussion of a week's readings; and a CSL experience, including a presentation about the experience. The instructions for these assignments are clear, while the learning activities themselves seem at an appropriate level of complexity for graduate studies.

The Student-led Discussion FEEDBACK form is concise, logical and well designed. However rather than five (Likert Scaled) questions, there are two compound questions. I suggest you separate "The presentation caught my attention" and "The material was interesting and varied", as well as "I was able to follow along easily" and "the presentation was engaging" as they are each different concepts.

Classroom atmosphere

The session started ostensibly 15 minutes later than the scheduled start time: this was to accommodate a student whose work commitment precluded their getting to campus any earlier. After my initial surprise, upon reflection this seems an entirely reasonable accommodation

As the penultimate session in the term, students often are enervated because of looming deadlines for assignments or examinations: holding such folks' attention can be a challenge. Yet during the session, Dr. Friedel facilitated learning activities that kept students engaged and attentive. Working in small groups, each reviewed one of the week's required readings and identified key aspects. Next each group presented their findings to the class at-large. At appropriate intervals Dr. Friedel interjected with

comments or questions: these were never close-ended or leading questions. thus they created a space where students could synthesize and integrate what was read in relation to their group work and, at times, own lived experiences.

During the small group task Dr. Friedel moved quietly about the room, listening in, offering clarification, or making small contributions to help a group stay on task. At several points she advised the class how much time was left and at what phase of their task each group should (approximately) be. Each group had progressed to different stages and had taken somewhat different tacks. Their work, however, was substantive regardless. This differentiated instruction worked very effectively.

In the space of one hour, students were writing, speaking, listening, reading and moving about. All of which seemed to make them engaged and attentive. My sense was that the students understood that Dr. Friedel had confidence in their abilities, which translated to high expectations.

Materials

The detailed course syllabus seems to serve multiple purposes. First, it maps out the structure and trajectory of the course, so students can track their progression through the course. Second, it also underscores the ethos of the instructor, as it related to this course, teaching *writ large*, and the role of place. Finally, the syllabus contains a logically organized, comprehensive list of course readings. As this syllabus is well organized, students should have little difficulty located precise answers to most common student questions.

I do encourage Dr. Friedel to consider adapting a few elements, with respect to making the syllabus a bit more accessible for students with disabilities. First, I think a friendly statement inviting students who might need accommodation to contact her opens a space where students unsure or anxious about disclosure would feel safe. Second, there are a number of places where text is written in a red (or red-toned) colour, which is difficult for persons with some visual impairments to see and read. Similarly, the font choice is a *serif*-type one, which can also be difficult for visually impaired persons to read: a *sans-serif* font (like Arial; used in this report) is better.

Overall

Dr. Friedel demonstrated to me that she is both well-organized and flexible; attentive to detail and open. Her efforts to design a course that represents her values, including a commitment to excellence, a passion for place and community, and learning-centered activities seem very successful. My constructive comments are of a nature that encourages Dr. Friedel to further refine what is already a polished and effective approach to teaching.

Kind regards,

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