

CHRISTIAN SELLAR – TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

My primary teaching interest is in the area of regional economic/social development, economic governance, international political economy and institutional change. I focus on the integration of the European Union, the post socialist transformation of Eastern Europe and Russia and the role of foreign direct investments in triggering economic and political change. My teaching draws on economic geography, particularly regional geography, economic sociology and political economy.

My teaching has been heavily influenced and shaped by the opportunity to work with colleagues and students in the United States, Italy and Russia. My undergraduate and PhD studies in Italy, along with teaching experience in Russia, accustomed me to lecturing, and to the idea that a good teacher is able to set a relatively high bar, in order to let each student feel positively challenged but not frustrated. My PhD and teaching experience in the United States taught me to be inclusive rather than exclusive; to structure discussion-oriented classes; to use a mix of textbooks, visual materials and news articles; and to put an emphasis on students.' In a typical day of class, I open emphasizing the learning objectives. My lecturing is as much interactive as possible, and encourages students to develop knowledge through reasoning, deduction and in-class discussion. I often include in-class exercises or homework aimed at applying the concepts studied in class to real world situations.

I believe in the importance of the establishment of clear standards from the first day of class. In my experience as student and TA, I found that stating clearly how the class is structured, what its goals are and how and why students are evaluated are effective ways to convey respect. In turn, this helps to establish a trust relationship between the teacher and the student. I found this to be a powerful tool for teacher self improvement, because it provides a low pressure atmosphere in which the students feel comfortable in giving productive feedback about the classroom work.

I recently taught independently World Regional Geography. I previously taught People and Places – an introductory course in human geography - and my approach is well received by students. With respect to lecturing, students comments include 'I like you show us our objectives;' 'powerpoint is very good; students can easily catch up the material.' With respect to discussion: 'I enjoy when we break into groups, this helps affirm our understanding and let us make contacts with our classmates;' 'open class discussion facilitates my learning;' 'at first I was upset about being called out in front of class, now I feel comfortable to express my thoughts.' Overall, students appreciate 'the relevance [of the class] to the world around us;' 'the openness of the professor' and 'the passion of the subject material of our professor' (see: Selected Students Comments in appendix). However, I am also a demanding teacher. I ask my students to engage in open discussion whenever the circumstances allow it. A few of my reading assignments are on purpose harder than average, in order to bring intellectual challenges to the class. Some of the students comments reflect such challenges: "A lot of questions asked to the class doesn't seem to have answers for and it's a bit painstaking to draw out one;" "please use scientific journals that are not as dense or difficult to read."

Teaching experiences

At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (USA) I taught World Regional Geography and People and Places. Previously, I have served as teaching assistant in Geography and International Studies. In the department of geography, my primary duties were exams and paper grading and advising students in the development of research papers. I held lectures as well. I worked with instructors of World Regional Geography, Developing World and Political Geography. In the department of International Studies I held recitation sections for the course in Global Issues. In each section, topics and readings from the class were discussed and deepened.

At the University of Trieste (Italy) I was teaching assistant in Political and Economic Geography and Geography of Oil Production. My primary duties were assisting the exams and occasional lectures. At the University of Trieste I worked as a Tutor for Communications Studies and Techniques of Advertising as well. My primary duties were advising students in developing their curriculum and to create more effective communication between faculty and students.

At Moscow State Linguistic University (Russia), I was a Lecturer of Italian in the Curriculum of Interpreting and Translation and in the Curriculum in Economics. In the curriculum in interpreting and translation, I taught conversation and reading in Italian to 2nd and 3rd year students. In the curriculum in Economics, I developed my own seminar in public law and news language for advanced (4th year) students.

Annexes

I have attached Selected Students Comments

Selected Students Comments

Class: People and Places

Term: Fall 2007

Enrolment: 22 students. There are regular college students plus continuing education; the age range is 17 to 60 plus. 50% are females. Majority is white, followed by Asians and African Americans. There are three international students.

“I like the discussion during this class. People can participate in it. it is fun. The atmosphere in classroom is great”

“Powerpoint is very good. Students can easily catch up the material”

“I can clearly see the passion of the subject material of our professor”

“I enjoy when we break into groups, this helps affirm our understanding and let us make contact with our classmates”

“At first I was upset about being called out in front of class, now I feel comfortable to express my thoughts”

“I like the outside readings selected overall and the de-emphasis on the book. It gives a broader perspective”

“I like the emphasis on discussion, both in groups and as a whole”

“I like that you show us our objectives before the class so we know what ideas we should be grasping”

“there is a good mixture of class lecture and group work”

“I am glad you ask us questions about why we think something. It forces us to come up with conclusions. You are very open to our answers too”

“I like the unusual variety of class presentation, like the walk. It is not boring”

“The professor uses powerpoint but does not completely rely on it”

“the readings go along well with what we are discussing”

“It is obvious that the instructor wants people to learn and has done research about the subject”

Class: World Regional Geography. Early feedback.

Term: Spring 2008

Enrollment: 47 students. The majority of the students are 1st and 2nd year undergraduate. Specifically, 32% 1st freshmen, 41% sophomore, 17% junior, 9% senior. Five students are Asian, seven African American, the remaining white. Twenty five are women. There are two international students.

“I like how the instructor allows the students to participate in discussion. [also,] it is good that he does not solely rely on powerpoint.”

“I like this class is structured in sections and that each world region will be taught in the same manner and style.”

“The professor is very passionate about the subject matter. This helps to engage me better in class discussion.”

“The questions for the readings are excellent for preparing for the lectures.”

“I like having open discussion from the classmates and teacher instead of the information being spoon-fed from the teacher to the students. I like the way this class makes you think on your own.”

“Powerpoints are very informative with useful examples. I also like how they introduce and conclude each presentation.”

“There is good communication: you let us know what we have due and when, and exactly what the readings are.”

“I like the non-textbook readings. It is helpful to see how geographers work in the real world.”

“Mr. Sellar is very knowledgeable, and it is good for me to hear someone to talk about geography who is not limited to an American prospective.”

“It is very helpful for me to have a teacher that encourages to go to events on campus that relate to the class.”

“A lot of questions asked to the class doesn't seem to have answers for and it's a bit painstaking to draw out one.”

“I hope to hear more of professor's lecture than classmate discussion.”

“Please use scientific journals that are not as dense or difficult to read.”

“I seem to get more out of the readings from the book instead of articles, they are a bit more difficult.”