

February 26, 2009

Laura Knudson
TCU Box 297270
Fort Worth, TX 76129

Dear Laura,

I would like to begin by saying how much I enjoyed working as a Graduate Assistant in your *Women's Studies: Images and Perspectives* course at Texas Woman's University. Aside from feeling welcome in your classroom and respected as your colleague, I am pleased to have had the chance to get to you on a personal level as well. In addition, I gained much needed classroom co-teaching experience which will aid me in my future academic endeavors.

Although I joined your class several weeks into the semester, I instantly sensed a congenial classroom environment where students not only felt attendance was important but participation as well. What I thought you did so aptly in structuring the class early on was in assigning points for the number of days a student was present in class. Honestly, I believe this to be a strong motivator in urging students to attend class, and it emphasizes the importance of being present in the classroom. In a course such *Women's Studies: Images and Perspectives*, one of the objectives is to develop students' "critical voice"; attendance is a key component to meeting this goal. As your Graduate Assistant, responsible for keeping track of attendance points, I was able to witness firsthand the effectiveness of your approach to ensuring attendance. I can say without hesitation that this method is one you should consider implementing in each of your classes.

Going further, one of the most important aspects to your classroom presentation and interaction with students is the way in which you handled extremely controversial topics including: feminism, sexuality, gender bias, disability, violence against women, and so forth. The topics mentioned above, and many more, are unquestioningly difficult material to introduce and deliver to undergraduates especially in a class with 50 students. However, you maintained extraordinary balance by stressing the importance of these issues in students' daily lives and in being constantly mindful of an array of diverse opinions about subjects discussed. Moreover you were efficient in creating an environment where the students felt safe enough to voice their thoughts and perspectives regarding controversial material.

Furthermore, expounding upon the unique balance you brought to the course material, you offered students the opportunity to view the complex nature of course material through readings which were enriched by documentary films shown in class. The documentary films, such as *Mickey Mouse Monopoly* and *Killing Us Softly*, I believe, are essential supplements to the required texts. In showing educational films such as these students are able to grasp complex material through visual aids. Along these same lines, you demonstrated an ease with classroom technology. The use of traditional textbooks, documentary films, websites, and digital media were a unique combination that I observed in your pedagogy.

What is more important, adding to your overall pedagogical approach, is the way in which you interact with students. From my perspective it is quite obvious that you have a passion for teaching and sincerely care about the development of those you instruct. I observed, on numerous occasions, your compassion not only for students' progress in your course but a

concern for their external responsibilities (i.e. work, caring for children, etc.); you often would lend an ear allowing a student to vent. Although you maintained discipline in terms of assignment due dates, I feel that you were open to listening to a student's particular circumstances when turning in a late assignment. Additionally, you advised students whose essays were lacking in form or content to consult with the Write Site on campus, as well as generously making corrections on papers enabling students to learn from grammatical errors and improve on future assignments.

Overall, I learned a great deal from being in the classroom with you. Initially, I was nervous about my first time at the "head of the class"; however, you welcomed and mentored me, and for that I am eternally grateful. Considering my distinct learning curve and sparse teaching experience, I am in no way apt to critique someone with your vast knowledge of women's studies and teaching expertise. However, I was able to observe, alongside your instruction, evolving dynamics in the classroom and development of students' agency in our diverse, multicultural, and gendered society.

Respectfully yours,

Jamie A. Riedel, M.Ed.

To: Laura Knudsen, Graduate Instructor

From: Larisa S. Asaeli, Graduate Instructor

09/29/08

RE: Observation of Your Class

I really enjoyed my visit to your class on Monday, September 22, 2008. Your cheerful and positive attitude that energizes your class, which is valuable with a 1 PM class.

As I reflect on my visit to your class, there are a few comments I want to share. I really enjoyed your teaching style. Your energy was infectious. Even though the reading assignment was not that exciting, you made it seem so by your enthusiasm. This is an area I could improve in. Sometimes I tend to be too severe and forget that teaching, especially Composition classes, can be fun!

Even though you were concerned about the students' level of participation, I felt like they participated well. But I do have a few suggestions that might help. Try calling on students instead of waiting for them to respond. Also, calling students by name might get more of them involved, especially the women. Lastly, if you would slow down at key points in the discussion and wait for students to answer, they might be more willing to participate. You often would ask a question and only wait a few seconds for an answer—then charge ahead when no one answered immediately. I did hear several students by me answer the questions to each other, so they evidently knew the answers.

What I have learned from you is that I could be better at exuding more energy in my own classes. I could also be better about directing all class discussion towards the writing assignments and pointing the students in that direction, as you clearly did in your class.