



Dear Niki,

May 2, 2018

I am writing to provide feedback on the two modules you taught for the GEOG 303: Field Study in Environmental Geography course on March 29th and April 19th, 2018. In those two sessions, you provided several types of content and associated activities. On March 29th, you led a lecture on the use of maps in Geography research, and best practices for displaying spatial information. In association with that lecture, you guided student interaction with a set of maps you had provided for analysis. On April 19th, you led a substantial portion of the class period, leading off with a presentation of your dissertation research methods and overall research methodology, and continuing with a lecture and interactive exercise on scientific communication through the medium of posters.

I have been very impressed with your approach to teaching over the three semesters over which we have collaborated as instructors. You proved indispensable as a relief course instructor in Spring 2015 when I went on family leave, taking over the GEOG 303: Field Study in Environmental Geography course partway through the semester. During that semester, you attended my lectures and labs, which covered the content and skills-building portion of the class. The concluding portion of the class, which you led, involved several weeks of student-led research projects and activities that supported student inquiry. The success of students during that semester owes a lot to your dedication to understanding the content and topics that I had covered, as well as your own contributions to the student-led research projects.

As a Teaching Assistant for GEOG 230: Our Changing Climate in Fall 2017 and for GEOG 303: Field Study in Environmental Geography in Spring 2019, you have proven to be an indispensable part of the instructional team, and add considerable value to student learning. You support students through timely and thoughtful feedback on their coursework, which improves their learning of course content as many assignments build towards larger course goals. Some students favored your office hours, perhaps because of timing but perhaps because they know that you are able to explain course concepts using different language and examples than I do. Further, some students may favor seeking advice and assistance from a woman, which could provide important access to certain students that I would be unable to offer.

In terms of the class meetings you taught this semester, I wanted to highlight several practices that I think are particularly effective at reaching students and teaching content and concepts.

First, you have a very effective presentation style that blends thoughtful use of visual display with deeper spoken explanations of the visuals. You modulate your voice well, changing pitch, tone, speed, and volume for emphasis, and your speaking voice sounds very natural and friendly. In my estimation, students respond well to your spoken delivery. You provide well-structured and well-organized presentation slides, which always frame the theme of the lecture and point to the order of concepts, and which also adhere to best practices for visual presentations. Your slides flow logically, and contain visually appealing images and figures that explain and support the concepts being explored. You are careful with text, deploying only as much written information as required.

I appreciated how, after providing enough concept support and context for the day's lesson, you provided hands-on group activities for the students. In both cases, when teaching about maps and scientific posters, you first framed the activity by walking through analysis of well-chosen examples with the entire group, providing examples of how to evaluate the activity materials. You then split the class into groups, assigning them particular sets of maps (or posters) to appraise, along with specific instructions about which features on which to focus their attention. The exercise materials were drawn from real-world applications, including published journal articles and posters presented at national conferences. In that sense, the materials served a dual purpose that usefully connects to course themes and content: they gave a glimpse to some of the research that geographers actually do, and also supported the central course objective of teaching research skills to undergraduates. After a period of time for the students to organize their thoughts, you then circulated around the classroom, checking in with groups and pointing them to features or factors they may have overlooked. This appeared to be a very effective strategy that provides students room to formulate their own ideas, but also allows course-corrections from the instructor.

Following time devoted for group reflection, you then reassembled the class and had groups debrief on what they saw, good and bad, in the example maps and posters you provided them. This regrouping allowed a greater diversity of student opinions and voices to be heard, and expanded the set of discoveries that the students were exposed to beyond what their group might have come up with. Helpfully, you displayed the corresponding map or poster in real-time, which allowed students who hadn't interacted with those particular materials to follow along.

The classes which you taught didn't require a tremendous amount of specific content, but the central goal of those class meetings was to teach skills related to the visual presentation and

communication of research. Those class meetings were structured to give students practice thinking about and critically approaching the function of and creation of maps, and the technique of communicating research results in poster form. The lecture content, the hands-on activities, and the engaging presentations you provided tracked into graded lab assignments that are designed to support the group research projects that the students were simultaneously working on. To that end, the expanded course content you worked into your lecture was extremely helpful in broadening the scope of the materials that I had planned on sharing with students, and doubtless improved their understanding of the course themes and assisted them in meeting overall course objectives in their research projects.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J Minor". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a stylized "Minor".

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