

September 24, 2018

RE: Teaching Observation of Ronnie Thibault, Spring 2018

In the spring 2018 quarter, I had the opportunity to observe Ronnie Thibault teach and to visit with her about her approach to education. The class I observed was DIS-ST/LSJ/CHID 430: "Disability Studies, Feminist Theory & Representation," on May 14, 2018. The class had approximately 20 students, all engaged in learning about different models for framing what "disability" means in society as well as analytical positions for understanding these models.

When I arrived at the class early, Ronnie was already there and had the room arranged to facilitate the planned learning activities. She had packets of learning materials prepared and staged for distribution during the planned sequence of learning activities. When class began, she started the class session with comments to clarify details about the next assignment (a final paper) and to address questions from the students. Throughout this portion of the class—and the entire class session more generally—she maintained a good rapport with the students. She made eye contact with them as they spoke and with all students in the room while she talked. She clearly knew and called on students by name. Her voice was clear and articulate.

During a demonstration and micro lecture portion of the class, Ronnie spoke fluently about the media content the students were being asked to consider. She made useful references to earlier classes sessions and specific conversations or exercises from them. The material in this portion of the class focused on different value perspectives, and Ronnie treated each in detail with examples. Her presentation was engaging and richly supported with images and video.

Later in the class period, Ronnie initiated a hands-on exercise in which she had students work in small groups to apply the value perspectives to media artifacts associated with the Pass It On campaign. After explaining the task, she brainstormed with the students about how they might execute the work. She then worked with them to hypothetically model the process on a sample problem. Before they began their small group work, the students had a clear understanding of how to productively engage the problem and how to succeed on the task. The exercise itself was well thought out and had clear connections to the world beyond the classroom.

On the whole, I found great value in observing Ronnie teach. She modeled classroom practices for engaging students that I found successful and worthy of emulation. She had mastery of the session content and yet was flexible in allowing the students' questions and responses to guide how the learning experience unfolded. As an instructor, she offers a great deal to her students and I am sure they find her classroom a productive learning space. I note that in her end-of-quarter student evaluations, Ronnie's class was very highly rated. In the categories of instructor's contribution and instructor's effectiveness, for example, she was rated 4.79 (on a 5.0 scale).

We are fortunate to have her in the classroom at the University of Washington.

Sincerely,



Mark Zachry, Professor