November 15, 2006

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Dr. Sanders:

I. Title of Course:
On October 4, 2006 I observed Krista McDonald’s EDL 110: University and the Student from 4:00p.m. until 4:50p.m. The course description states: “EDL 110 helps students understand how Miami University operates and how the resources of the university can be used to meet the students’ educational goals. This course provides first-year students with an opportunity to engage with other learners while becoming familiar with the expectations of an academic community.” Eight students attended the class on this Wednesday afternoon.

II. Strengths:
At the onset of the class it was evident that Krista had created a safe and structured learning environment for students to succeed. Before class she engaged several students in friendly conversations about their lives (she inquired if a student was still having car trouble). The introduction for the day’s lesson on diversity was already on the board. Krista began the class addressing housekeeping issues and requested to speak to a few students after class. Every class had a volunteer time keeper to make sure the class did not go over its’ allotted time. Krista has obviously succeeded in one of the primary goals for class, opportunity to engage with other learners because students were in discussion before and at the start of class.

Addressing the topic of diversity in a fruitful and meaningful manner in a first year seminar is difficult and tricky at best. Krista led students with ease through the lesson. They participated, engaged and seemed to connect to Krista’s approachable style and manner which always started with their experiences and thoughts. The lesson was a large group discussion revolving around the differences between stereotypes and prejudice. She included hands on experience to alleviate the usual tension and apprehension that typically accompanies discussions on diversity and difference.
Throughout the exercise Krista would often encourage clarification and elaboration on student’s comments. Krista’s prompting allowed students to engage the topic more deeply. She did not allow surface answers to remain. When Krista’s follow-up questions or remarks were misunderstood by students she quickly and skillfully rephrased the question with examples. All students were engaged in the discussion and exercises participating in the class. Krista’s strengths include her ability to create the environment where students feel safe to contribute, disagree, and ask questions. She skillfully walked with students through multiple areas of diversity including race, socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation, and culture.

III. Areas for Improvements:
While Krista often asked questions to further the large group discussion on diversity, several times Krista moved on to another question before the group could digest her emphasis. Increased wait time could have allowed students to engage more deeply with the topic. In a first year class it truly is an art to find the balance between wait time and encouraging discussion with questions. Since this was Krista’s first time teaching EDL 110, this skill will be developed in the future with experience.

IV. Comments:
In conclusion, Krista is an excellent instructor. Her use of multiple modes of teaching to address the class topic combined with her ability to create a safe learning environment, provide first year students with an excellent beginning seminar. Her ability to ground the lesson in students’ experiences allows the primary goals of EDL 110 to be easily met. As an instructor, Krista McDonald is an asset to this first year seminar and the Miami University Hamilton community.

Sincerely,

Peter J. Haverkos
Director of Learning Assistance
Miami University Hamilton