

DEPAUL UNIVERSITY



INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

TO: MARK LIGHT, PHD
FROM: TRENT A. ENGBERS, PHD
SUBJECT: 2012 TEACHING OBSERVATION
DATE: January 11, 2013
CC: WILLIAM CALZARETTA, PHD

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I am writing to submit my teaching evaluation for Dr. Mark Light. I observed Dr. Light's Strategic Planning course on Thursday, October 3, 2012. I have also had the opportunity to observe Dr. Light teach MPS 500 on a number of occasions. It is based on these observations that I can confirm that Dr. Light is an outstanding teacher. His classroom is a dynamic and educational environment. His approach to education energizes his students and his Janus faced approach simultaneously supports and challenges students to think about strategic planning in new and interesting ways. This is fostered through a series of specific strengths including:

- Engaging students before the class even begins. He calls each student by name and finds opportunities to demonstrate that he knows facts about the student's personal and professional life. This builds trust between student and faculty and creates a sense of responsibility for the student. Even students who were disgruntled about assignments or grades approached the class jovially because of his personal touch.
- Connecting pop culture to academic topics. Dr. Light is well attuned to the student experience and is able to connect occasionally dry topics to recent movies, television shows and sporting events. This helps keep the students attention and enables them to better understand the applicability of academic theories.
- Engage students actively in the large group. Despite being a mid-sized class that would lend itself well toward small group activities, the strategic planning class had a significant amount of large group engagement. Students would respond to his presentations without being prompted. They would discuss topics with each other rather than only engaging Dr. Light. This was all done without seeming chaotic or distracting.
- Strong use of visuals. Dr. Light uses diagrams and images to demonstrate concepts. In particular his most recent lecture utilized a repeating process diagram to help students follow the strategic planning process. The diagram was repetitive but continued to build upon itself. This appeared to be a particularly effective way to reach visual learners.

I am hard pressed to identify drawbacks in his course design and teaching skills. The two critiques that I would offer are as follows:

- Dr. Light and I appear to have different philosophical approaches to the syllabus. While I consider the syllabus to be a contractual relationship, it appears that Dr. Light uses the syllabus as a guide to structure the class and set expectations. The syllabus appears to

change slightly over the course of the semester in order to maximize learning. The students appeared to have no objection to this structure, but I fear that it opens the instructor up for grade complaints or may make it difficult for students to plan their semester.

- The syllabus is missing a few elements of traditional syllabus design. In particular, there are no objectives and it is unclear from the syllabus how papers will be evaluated. Linking assignments to specific objectives helps students understand the context of the assignments and better recognize what they should be learning by completing the papers. Clear criteria for evaluation or detailed grading rubrics while at times limiting can also help ensure equality in grading and serve as a motivating factor in encouraging good writing.

Yet, despite these issues, Dr. Light is a tremendous asset to the department and a powerful teacher and mentor for our students.