Classroom Observation Report (Open-Ended)

Instructor ___Jillian Maxey_____   Observer ___Ruth Langer_____

Course __TH 162 Religious Quest_____   Number of students present __c. 32_____

Date/time of observation January 28, 2014, 12-12:50_____ Location __Cushing 331_____

NOTE:
This form may be used by the observer to report feedback from the classroom observation. The observer should meet with the instructor several days in advance of the visit to determine the goals, context, and logistics of the classroom visit in advance. The instructor should also provide the observer with a copy of the course and any other relevant materials that will help the observer prepare for the visit. Within several days after the visit, the observer(s) should meet with the instructor to discuss observations and conclusions.

1. Describe the instructor's knowledge of the topic and students.

This class was one of several leading the students through close readings of Genesis 2-3 and commentaries on it. This class focused on four post-biblical discussions (2nd Temple texts). The book being used provided basic background on each reading, but Jillian had clearly researched them further, making sure to set historical and genre contexts. This is not her area of expertise, but she has enough background to teach this adequately at an introductory level.

Jillian knows each student by name and before and after class especially made brief more personal comments to several – for example, one who had been out sick. The relationships seemed warm and personable.

2. Describe the instructor's organization during the class.

She began class by handing back reading reflections with her comments. These reflections were on the texts to be discussed that day. She asked students to be sure to share their comments in class, especially where she had pointed out ones that she found important. She then had the class move into a horseshoe shape to facilitate discussion and taught from within this horseshoe.

Content of the class was arranged around the four texts being discussed. For each she had one or more powerpoint slides giving the key elements of background needed properly to interpret that text. Then either she or a student read the text (or selections of it) out loud. Jillian had prepared carefully in advance which verses she intended to discuss and elicited interpretations of these

verses from the students, validating all their proposals, but picking up some and running with them to ensure that her agenda was met as well.

She was conscious of time, kept class moving along, and ended promptly.

Perhaps because this class was one of a series of similar ones, there was no general introduction to the issues being raised or synthesis of what had been discussed. That will be appropriate in the dialogue between the various segments of this unit.

3. Describe the method(s) of instruction.

See #2.

4. Describe the instructor's communication effectiveness.

Excellent. There was some use of technical or more advanced vocabulary, but I did not have the sense that students were failing to understand. Again, some of the more technical elements were probably previously introduced.

5. Describe the form and extent of student participation.

Students volunteered answers to Jillian's questions freely. While not everyone spoke up, perhaps about half the students did. While the class was discussion-based, the students only rarely actually responded to each other. She did not call on students who had not volunteered.

6. What overall impact do you think this lesson had on students and their learning outcomes?

A primary goal here was to teach the students to read ancient texts closely with attention to details. The homework assignment focused on a small selection of texts (c. 10 pp.), creating the opportunity for this focus. By requiring the students to write a graded reflection on the texts in advance with questions guiding their reflections, the students were not able to avoid struggling with the details of the texts. Class discussion then also modelled this sort of reading as well as its challenges, bringing out numerous instances where the text is open to various interpretations.

Another goal has been to make students aware of their presuppositions in reading the Genesis narrative and to think deeply about various ways that it is possible to understand issues it raises, like sin, gender roles, etc. These issues came up in the discussion of these texts, but the answers given over the various assignments for this unit present an even wider kaleidoscope of possibilities. Sorting through these possibilities for a single topic, using their close reading skills, will be the assignment for the students' first paper.

Student participation in class suggested that they are aware of this agenda and are making progress in achieving these goals.

7. What were the instructor's major strengths as demonstrated in this observation?

Creating a warm collaborative learning environment.
Thinking creatively and constructively about how to combine content, student skill achievement, and pedagogical method.
Bringing the students to being engaged in learning ancient texts.

8. What suggestions do you have for the instructor for improving their teaching skills?

To arrive in the classroom early enough to set up her computer, hand back responses and have chairs set up in advance. The reason she didn't do this is that frequently the previous class hasn't ended in time – and I encouraged her to communicate to that professor that she needs access to the room.

To consider a few sentences at the beginning summarizing where they are in terms of the development of the larger questions being addressed, and to conclude with a few sentences summarizing what has been achieved in this particular class.

Did you have a pre-visit conference? __not face to face, but I had her syllabus and we

communicated by email about what she was covering. She had been my TA for the same

course…

A post-visit conference? ___yes_____