



October 28, 2016

Ms Katelyn Horgan Butler
Graduate Teaching Assistant
PP/Bot123 Fall, 2016

Dear Katelyn,

I appreciate the opportunity to give you feedback on your teaching in Plant Pathology/Botany 123 today. I observed you teaching lab section 305, which meets from 11-12:15 on Fridays. All of the 18 enrolled students attended this 75-minute lab class today. The class began with reminders about the pet microbe update due today and the upcoming lecture exam. You then described the goal of today's concept map exercise (to understand the process of gene expression) and asked students a few questions about transcription and translation. You quickly went through an example of a concept map on a slide. *A suggestion on this activity:* this process could have been more interactive and informative if you had asked the students to suggest the connections between the terms instead of supplying them yourself all at once on the next slide and then moving quickly into the activity. Slowing this introduction down a bit also might have helped you determine if everyone understood the lab goals. It seemed that some of the students did not understand what they were supposed to do at first (though they did eventually figure it out).

The students plunged immediately into the group activity; they seemed comfortable working together. Every student in each group appeared to be at least somewhat engaged in developing the concept map, suggesting that you have taught your students the habit of approaching scientific problems as a team. You were engaged with the students throughout this activity, which took about an hour. *You demonstrated skilled one-on-one and small-group-type teaching in this part of the class*, checking in with each group regularly, asking guiding questions, and providing input when asked. You did a good job of letting the students lead the way; you were engaged and interested in your students' work, but did not tell them what to do. You did intervene a few times to correct a significant misconception and to clarify the general confusion about the role of tRNA. In some cases, you reached out specifically to a student who did not seem engaged, asking that person to explain their group's concept map. At the end of the hour, you looked over and approved the final concept map for each group.

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In the last segment of the lab students collected results from their ongoing individual Pet Microbe experiments. Most of them needed instructions or advice on interpreting these and setting up next experiments. You responded calmly and constructively to many questions in a short time window. The students were obviously comfortable asking you questions, suggesting *they find you accessible and helpful*.

You have a clear and easily understandable speaking style, which is an excellent quality in a teacher. Your overall presence in front of the classroom was energetic and enthusiastic. Presenting your information in a slightly more deliberate and interactive style might increase your impact on struggling students.

Overall, this was a successful lab session and I'm confident most of your students reached the lab learning goals. It was nice to see you advancing your development as a teacher and science communicator in general.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Caitlyn Allen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Caitlyn Allen
Ethyl and O. N. Allen Professor of Plant Pathology
University of Wisconsin-Madison

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Plant Pathology 123 TA Results (Butler)

Fall 2016

Item	Question	_1	_2	_3	_4	_5	OMIT	ITEMTOTAL	MEAN	SD
1	Please indicate your year in school:	21	7	7	0	0	0	35		
2	How often do you attend this course:	33	1	0	0	1	0	35		
3	Workload relating to credits earned:	2	32	1	0	0	0	35		
4	Overall quality of instructor.	0	0	0	1	34	0	35	4.97	0.17
5	Knowledge of the subject.	0	0	0	0	35	0	35	5.00	0.00
6	Interest in course.	0	0	0	2	33	0	35	4.94	0.24
7	Ability to explain subject clearly.	0	0	1	1	33	0	35	4.91	0.37
8	Ability to stimulate thinking.	0	0	0	5	30	0	35	4.86	0.36
9	Ability to stimulate interest in subject.	0	0	1	4	30	0	35	4.83	0.45
10	Organization of instructor.	0	0	0	1	34	0	35	4.97	0.17
11	Enthusiasm of instructor.	0	0	0	0	35	0	35	5.00	0.00
12	Availability of instructor to students.	0	0	1	1	33	0	35	4.91	0.37
13	If you were to recommend this lab to another student, what overall evaluation would you give?	0	0	0	1	33	1	34	4.97	0.17
14	Clarity of the purpose and expectation of each lab.	0	0	1	1	33	0	35	4.91	0.37
15	Clarity of the written instructions.	0	0	0	1	34	0	35	4.97	0.17
16	Value of designing or conducting your own experiments as a learning tool.	0	0	0	2	33	0	35	4.94	0.24
17	Value of lab in understanding lecture.	0	0	1	3	31	0	35	4.86	0.43
18	Value of group projects (if applicable).	0	0	0	4	31	0	35	4.89	0.32

Q1 Scale: 1= Freshman; 2= Sophomore; 3= Junior; 4= Senior; 5= Graduate; 6= Special; 7= Short Course (Year 1); 8= Short Course (Year 2); 9= Short Course (Year 3)

Q2 Scale: 1= Always or almost always; 2= Usually; 3= Almost half the time; 4= Infrequently; 5= Almost Never

Q3 Scale: 1= Too little; 2= Just right; 3= Too much

Q4-18 Scale: 1 (Poor); 3 (Average); 5 (Excellent)

Selection of Student Comments from TA Evaluation for PIPath123 Fall 2016

“Katelyn is really passionate about the class and does everything she can to share that with the students ”

“She encourages in depth thinking of scientific topics with guidance, contagious enthusiasm/organization. ”

“She is very enthusiastic and encourages the best in her students. Very well organized and gives us all resources we need to be successful ”

“Excellent TA! I really liked it that you walked around and answered all the questions thrown at you. You were also very reachable through email so that helped a lot. Thanks for making lab so great!”

Personal Reflections on Teaching Evaluations

First, reading through Dr. Allen’s evaluation of my lab section she observed gave me encouragement, as well as bringing awareness to ways I could improve as an instructor. During the laboratory section she observed, I was leading the students through a group concept mapping exercise on gene expression - which was exhausting! There had only been a brief lecture on gene expression held before in class, so there were a lot of details the students needed to be refreshed. She mentions in the first paragraph how I *quickly* went over an example concept map and could have made this introduction more interactive and in depth in order to make more students comfortable with the activity of “concept mapping”. I am fully aware that I have a tendency to rush things, and knowing that the activity for today would require a lot of time, I did feel pushed to get to work. However, I understand the importance in slowing down and remembering to take my time with new material. Looking ahead, I will make sure to plan to take more time explaining new activities and ideas and not rush to the activity. If students do not fully understand what they are supposed to do, it will take them longer to fully engage in the activity and will lose valuable time that could be spend engaging material - and learning!

I greatly appreciated hearing Dr. Allen’s comments on my approach to teaching small groups, individuals, and the class as a whole. This activity was particularly

chaotic, jumping from group to group answering questions and making sure students were on track with this complex activity. It is reassuring to hear the instructor support my methods of instruction and confirm they were helpful and that students were achieving the learning goals set for them. I admire Dr. Allen as a professor and greatly valued her feedback on my teaching.

Obviously, I'm floored with the overwhelmingly positive student feedback I received this semester. Students seemed to catch my enthusiasm for the class and had fun! It was quite the endeavor when students were setting up their own experiments and I had 18 questions to answer all at once. For the students to appreciate my efforts to accommodate and answer everyone's questions as best I can is gratifying. My goal for this class, being a non-majors class, was to introduce the students to the fun and excitement of biology (particularly plant pathology and microbes!). It seems that most of the students left with a bit of my "contagious" enthusiasm and excitement for the subject. I even had some first-years inquire about plant pathology as a major and career! The well-organized and thought-out lab exercises were a huge help in this experience. I did not plan them and greatly appreciated the team supporting me who did so that I could focus on interacting with the students. Finally, To hear that the students felt that I was pushing them to be the best students they could be and noticed my desire to share my enthusiasm with the students is all I can ask for as an instructor. In all, this experience was a wonderful time of my graduate education, and I'll miss being in the lab with these students (although, a break from lab report grading is much accepted!).