

# Classroom Observation Form

Instructor: Megan Fork      Date/Time: 11 February, 2016 6:15-7:30 pm

Location: LSRC A247      No. of Students: 24

Course Title: ENV 744 – Conservation and Ecology of Rivers and Streams

Topic(s) of Day: Stream Habitat Practicum (determining discharge, characterizing substrate, qualitatively and quantitatively assessing habitat quality)

## Instructor

### Clarity and Organization

(introduction, coherent presentation, reference materials/readings, answer student questions fully, effective transitions)

The worksheet distributed before class is easy to understand with detailed steps and descriptions.

The whole class is well organized in three sessions and the time schedule assigned for each session was well followed.

Students are formed into small working groups with 3 -5 people and they can actively involve and discuss in a dynamic environment.

In the beginning of the class, the instructor gave an overview of the tasks and some instructions (format, etc) to the students and encouraged critical thinking and discussions in groups before asking questions.

In the end of the class, students were asked to give feedbacks about class materials.

I've noticed that some groups are silent in asking questions and more attention should be paid to them. It's probably better to constantly check on students' progresses and offer help and guides to them.

## The Students

### Student Comprehension / Level of Critical Thinking

Students are getting into working together pretty fast and some groups start to ask questions. The instructor is very prompt in answering students' questions. Instead of giving direct answers, the instructor provided suggestions and gave examples to guide students into thinking and discussion. Students responded very positively to these guides.

Near the end of each session, students were asked to present their answers on the white board. Different approaches of problem solving and good interactions with students are really encouraging.

## V. General Comments & Summary (on the class, outcomes, recommendations)

\* Be affirming, descriptive, and focus on specific behaviors

The whole class is well organized in three sessions and the time schedule assigned for each session was well followed. The structure of the class that divides students into small working groups is a good format to simulate students' critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and teamwork. Worksheets distributed to students are well prepared. Good job!

# Classroom Observation Form

Instructor: *Megan Fork*

Date/Time: *Tuesday, March 29 2016 6:15-7:30 pm*

Location: *LSRC A247*

No. of Students: *26*

Course Title: *Ecology and Conservation of Streams and Rivers*

Topic(s) of Day: *Primary Production*

## Instructor

### a. Clarity and Organization

(introduction, coherent presentation, reference materials/readings, answer student questions fully, effective transitions)

I thought your presentation was very well-organized. You presented three questions at the beginning of the PowerPoint which introduced the topics for the class to the students, and on the left of every slide was a subtitle for the topic you were discussing. Each slide was organized as a short outline with only a small number of words, and with pictures, charts, and graphs. I think the PowerPoint was quite well-designed. I also heard one of your students compliment you on the figures in your slide at the end of class.

As you transitioned from topic to topic, you asked the students to discuss the topic in small groups. I think this helped to break up an hour and fifteen minutes of lecture to keep the students interested. Then you asked the students to provide ideas from their small group discussions to outline the topic for the class. This allowed you to keep checking in with the students, and it seemed that they were prepared for class because they were naming most of the major points you were touching on in the lecture. These small group discussions seemed to be very effective transitions.

You were also very careful to check in for questions. Several students asked questions when they did not understand, and as you were constantly getting ideas from the class, you were also able to elaborate where they seemed to have a misunderstanding. Through this process, I think you did a very good job of answering students' questions fully.

Where you might have been able to benefit in terms of organization is time management. Overall, I think you covered a lot of important topics, but you noted at the end of class that you did not get to invasive macrophytes, a topic you had hoped to cover. I know that it is very hard to predict how long it will take to cover each topic, but you may have been able to pick up a bit of time in a few places. You started at 6:18, so the class started close to on time with a few housekeeping items. You may have been able to gain some time by reducing the length of small group discussion. I think the last small group discussion ran a bit longer than others. Time management, however, is very difficult, and I think it was important for you to respond to some of the students' questions. They did need some help in areas such as the concepts of top down and bottom up, which they seemed to have covered before but had not remembered clearly. I am sure with time and experience you will learn how to gauge time better, allowing for time for questions. On the other hand, it is impossible to predict what will happen in a class, so it is probably inevitable that some things don't get covered sometimes.

I also liked your use of notecards at the end of class. You asked each student to write one thing she learned and one thing she still had a question about. I think this is a great way to get feedback!

## The Students

### b. Student Attentiveness and Engagement (beginning, middle, end)

I think overall most students were very engaged. For the most part, they were very enthusiastic about the small group discussed, and quite willing to contribute to classroom discussion. This was true from beginning to end.

There were two students that arrived late within the first three minutes, and two more students that arrived later than that. I am not sure when the last two students came in because they were entering from the back door and sitting at the back. One female student that arrived late sat behind me, and she had no group to discuss with. I was impressed when the five person group in front of me saw her and convinced her to move up with their discussion group. This really indicated to me that many students wanted to include everyone in the class, and were very eager to discuss the material.

There were, however, several exceptions. A blond female student in a light blue shirt, and a brown-haired male student in a Duke jersey seemed to be almost completely disengaged. They both had their laptops out the whole class and were focused on the screens, rather than your lecture. At first I considered that they may be taking notes, but after a while it was clear that they were not. The female student was also eating, and divided her time between eating and typing on her computer. They also did not join the small group discussions. Only one other student had a computer out. He was in front of me, and his screen had timed out most of the time. The main time I saw him using it though was when he was checking his email. In other words, of the three students that had their computer out, I don't think any of them were using them to take notes, or in other ways related to the course. To resolve this problem, you may ask the class not to use computers. Another idea would be to move around the classroom and see what they are doing. Just the idea that you may see the screens, or a glance at them when you know they are doing something not related to the class may stop them from using the computer. When the students are discussing in small groups, it would be a particularly good time to float around the room, and see what they are doing and saying, making sure everyone is participating.

Finally, after the female student behind me moved up with the five person discussion group, she sat next to a male student. They were talking to each other at different times during lecture. I think they were talking about the class because they pointed to notes and the screen at the front of the room sometimes, but I had a sense it may have helped more if they asked you about questions they had, so you may be able to answer them to the whole class. I did notice their whispering was distracting to another student in at least one occasion. One way that you might be able to address this problem and the computer problem is by cold-calling students. There were enough students volunteering to talk that it would not be necessary to cold-call, but if you cold-call on students that are not paying attention or are talking with each other, it may bring them back to the class.

Another question I had was about the students that are absent. There were 12 students absent. My understanding was that many of them are doing field research this time of year. Do they need to make up missed class somehow?

I do want to emphasize that, although I focused on the exceptions, I thought most of the class was very engaged, and I was really quite impressed in their genuine interest in the content. I think they responded very well to your interactive style of teaching, both in the small group discussion and the large group discussion.