

Teaching Reflections Spring 2017

What a great semester. I was so impressed with the students this term. Their exam scores increased over the term, and, some of their tutorial assignments were fantastic. Students today are light-years ahead of where I was in first year. People may complain about Generation Z but for me, students today are better than ever.

Some of the things that went particularly well this term included:

- Moving the description of tutorial assignments away from lecture and back to tutorials was the right thing to do. TAs and their students need to be able to work together more closely to create a better product than is possible by me trying to review everything in a lecture. While it was a good attempt at saving some hours from the TAs I think it is important we keep this level of instruction as close to students as possible.
- Like last semester, students continue to voice their frustrations on our (my) high standards but the grade distributions for the term were excellent (i.e., less than a 3% average grade variation across course/section, normal distributions by grade, etc.) as were students' achievement (lots of students received A level grades).
- I was pleased that my content revisions in 100B with racialization, religion and the environment went well.
- Using a single source on how to cite academic sources seems to have worked better than last semester.
- Our move to 8 tutorials (from 7 last semester) was appreciated by TAs and their students.

Some of the things that I need to continue working on, include:

- I need to try harder to get the TAs more comfortable with understanding why we (I) do the things we do. For example, TAs (and students) are frustrated by my position that we can't "teach the A". There is the perception that if a student is able to regurgitate lecture/text material that they deserve the A – I simply do not agree. For me (and for good or bad, as the teacher I get to decide such things) A's go beyond the material. An A only exists when a student demonstrates the ability to transcend the material and apply sociological insights that we cannot predict nor define. TAs are nervous trying to defend their scoring and students are frustrated that they cannot "get it" right away even though they study. However, over the term, with practice and with time, many students do start to push themselves and their understanding of the material, and get the As. The fact that many, many students do, confirms that the standard is achievable. However, what I need to do better is communicate to students and TAs the context and justification for why I take this position and my evidence supporting that it works.

All in all, a great semester and a great year.

/Bruce