

## **2019 'Exemplary' Overall Instructional Narrative Lupco Spasovski , English Department, YR4 of PAR**

IDP Plan – Year 4: Instructional Narrative by  
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PAR Mentor: Dr. Lutfi Hussein

### **Overview**

This instructional narrative contains the following major sections:

1. Review of the feedback from classroom evaluations and observation
2. Self-evaluation: documented strengths and projected areas for development
3. Service
4. Professional Development

### **Review of the feedback**

#### **Dr. Jeffrey Andelora, Dean of Instruction**

The Dean's evaluation highlighted my teaching effectiveness in the following areas: student engagement, pacing of activities, critical thinking, connecting knowledge to practice, monitoring progress and checking understanding, and classroom environment. Dr. Andelora's evaluation suggests that my students and I are highly engaged through well-paced classroom activities. Next, the evaluation suggests that students are encouraged to think critically through abundant examples, thorough explanations, and positive feedback. My rapport with students was assessed as excellent, and no suggestions for improvement were given.

#### **Dr. Craig Jacobsen, English Department Chair**

The Chair's evaluation foregrounded my effectiveness in promoting critical thinking, content areas, language acquisition pedagogy, and student learning. He noted that, "Never was the class simply about memorizing things, but about helping students to see the underlying logic of how phrasal verbs work so that they could think through how they might apply that thinking to a range of situations." Commenting on my delivery and student learning, Dr. Jacobsen closed his evaluation by stating, "It is a pleasure to watch him teach..." He marked all of the assessment rubrics with "excellent" emphasizing my command of the content and language acquisition pedagogy, as well as acknowledging the learning and immediate value of the material taught.

#### **Dr. Lutfi Hussein, PAR Mentor**

Dr. Hussein added his observation comments on two major areas: use of technology in the classroom, and classroom environment. He acknowledged my continued excellence in multimedia use in the classroom. Dr. Hussein summed up my use of technology as "masterful" further noting that it is tailored to relevant pedagogical needs, where new information is presented in an effective and engaging fashion. His observations of the classroom environment were summed up as, "... it is evident you have cultivated an educational environment in which

students feel welcomed, respected, and supported, so much so that students attend on time, work together collaboratively, speak in turn, ask questions when not clear on words or concepts, laugh at their own mistakes, and do not hesitate to speak up. They seem to respect you not only as a teacher but also as a mentor and a guide. For respecting their diverse needs and gaining their confidence, I applaud you. It is heartwarming to seem a class that works as a unit, an efficient and successful one. Well done!"

### **Self-evaluation**

As outlined above, my self-evaluation is informed by the strengths documented in my classroom evaluations and observations from the Dean, Department Chair, PAR mentor, and my students.

### **Documented strengths**

The major documented strengths of my instruction emerged as recurring acknowledgments of my classroom management, professional competence, rapport, and overall instructional effectiveness. I will focus on five strengths suggested in the commentaries I received. They are ordered tentatively, but I feel they well represent some of the high points of my teaching effectiveness.

#### **1. Creating a highly engaging environment and being engaged**

For me, this is where it all begins. I believe that one of our primary tasks is to engage the students by presenting the material in an interesting form that promotes interaction and learning by doing. Dean Andelora found my teaching to be "highly engaged and engaging." The Department Chair assessment read, "... the class was divided into two big blocks, and that itself helped to "shift gears" and re-engage students in a new way. Even within these two large divisions, though, Lupco asked students to approach the subjects (phrasal verbs and tipping) in more than one way. The students seemed very engaged throughout the period." In his observation, Dr. Hussein wrote, "I congratulate you on your hard work in developing an appropriate and effective approach in presenting new information and engaging your students in learning." One of my ENG101 online students commented. "Dr. Spasovski presents a challenging, but engaging online course. I was very pleased with this class."

#### **2. Promoting critical thinking and learning**

Critical thinking is instrumental in conducting objective analysis and evaluation of an issue or problem in order to form an informed judgment. Thus, effective learning involves development of critical thinking skills and reaching informed decisions and judgments. The comments I have received suggest that my teaching routinely encourages critical thinking and promotes learning. In his assessment, Dr. Andelora's remarks, "Adverbials are abstract and especially challenging for non-native speakers, so students were regularly asked to think critically, to think through the nuances of meaning that came with each word." Dr. Jacobsen affirmed that my teaching promotes critical thinking and learning, and wrote, "In relation to phrasal verbs, Lupco asked students to think about both their own language and how it dealt with similar issues, and their own experiences with phrasal verbs in English." One of my students added these remarks on their learning experience in ENG101, "I loved Dr. Spasovski! This was my first online class and it was a great first experience. It worked perfectly with my busy work schedule. He was also very tentative with any questions or concerns I had regarding my assignments and replied almost immediately. The assignments were also great in that they all were about topics I was

genuinely curious about. They also were not overwhelming and were easy to get accustomed to after taking a gap semester. I was very happy with this course and Dr. Spasovski!"

### **3. Encouraging students through prompt and positive feedback**

Encouragement is another crucial aspect of learning: students can relate better to the course material and instructor, know that their work and efforts are valued, and, develop high self-esteem and self-worth. In my responses, I try to be prompt, encouraging, and thorough. Dr. Andelora's summative remarks seem to support this strength in my teaching; "Regularly checks in: Is it clear? You got it?; Responds well to student questions. Answers are thorough, replete with examples that students can relate to.; Very encouraging--provides positive feedback: "Perfect." "Very good." "Excellent." Dr. Jacobsen also affirms that, "Lupco is very good at this. He regularly expresses his appreciation of the difficulties the students are facing. He is encouraging when they struggle to articulate questions, and best of all, I think, he conveys genuine good humor about the subject without trivializing the importance of what they are trying to learn or the struggle they sometimes have in learning it." My PAR mentor, Dr. Hussein, adds, "As for the second area, encouraging students to participate in class activities, it is evident you have cultivated an educational environment in which students feel welcomed, respected, and supported, so much so that students attend on time, work together collaboratively, speak in turn, ask questions when not clear on words or concepts, laugh at their own mistakes, and do not hesitate to speak up." Perhaps the most rewarding comments about my encouragement and positive feedback come from my students.

"Dr. Spasovski was encouraging and provided valuable feedback on all of my writing! I would highly recommend him."

"I would like to start off and say that I think that Dr. Spasovski is a saint. Having peer reviewed numerous papers this semester I have no idea how he, or any, teacher at this level can read the essays that are written. It is clear that most students do not follow the instructions, do not write the correct type of essay, and have no experience with MLA/AP formatting. That aside, Dr. Spasovski provided extremely valuable information and insight every time I needed it, requested it, and even when it was part of a review on a paper that I wrote. I would love to have him in any of my future classes and will highly recommend him. Thank you for taking the time to teach us, I learned a lot and look forward to putting it to use in my professional career. Patrick Daley"

"Thank you for being an amazing teacher. You really cared to help us students."

"I really appreciate that you posted the announcement giving the class kudos on our effort. I don't know many teachers who'd do that."

"Thanks for the amazing feedback! You're a lifesaver!"

### **4. Demonstrating high competence and cross-cultural awareness**

Students expect their professors to be highly competent and knowledgeable. Moreover, language teaching competence includes keen awareness of students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as their specific needs and expectations. Dr. Jacobson's comments testify to my knowledge and cultural awareness: "Lupco knows his stuff, and he knows it two ways. He knows it as a linguist who can describe to you, in formal linguistic terminology, what is going on

with any particular portion of the language. He can talk about phrasal verbs and transitivity, etc. He also knows it as someone who has learned English and takes joy in language in general. At this level he is able to connect with students more personally and to laugh with them about their frustration and celebrate their gains. Together students get a very effective blend of the scholarly and personal.” On a related note, an effective instructor ought to be well versed in technology – a skill that is essential for multi-modal learning. Multi-modality accommodates a wide range of learning needs and styles, and I strive to keep abreast with learning technology. Dr. Hussein observed, “I am particularly pleased with the technical skillfulness and pedagogical thoughtfulness you demonstrated in using the companion website, offering students listening passages to test their comprehension of spoken discourse; the online dictionary, displaying the effective use of online resources; the Google trove of online images, ensuring students’ comprehension of relevant and useful words and concepts; the Google Docs, as a useful visual tool to help students process new information; and, finally, the textbook, as a main reference for students in learning and practicing English. In brief, your use of multimedia in class is masterful.”

## **5. Excellent rapport with students**

Students tend to be more successful if they feel respected and valued, and if they respect their professor. I take pride in establishing and nurturing excellent rapport with my students. The comments below verify the mutual respect students and I share. Dr. Andelora notes, “The environment is challenging and rigorous, but the students all feel safe as evidenced by the smiles on their faces and their willingness to participate. The instructor clearly respects his students and they him.” In assessing my rapport with the class, Dr. Jacobsen adds, “This is a particular strength of Lupco’s.” Dr. Hussein also comments that “They seem to respect you not only as a teacher but also as a mentor and a guide. For respecting their diverse needs and gaining their confidence, I applaud you. It is heartwarming to seem a class that works as a unit, an efficient and successful one. Well done!”

### **Areas for development**

The evaluations from the Dean and my Department Chair did not include any suggestions for improvement or change, nor did the observations from my PAR mentor. They all contained positive feedback on different aspects of my teaching without pointing to any shortcomings. Most of the students’ comments were equally positive, expressing appreciation, praise, and acknowledgement of their learning.

However, one student in ENG101 online I taught last fall suggested some adjustment of my grading policy. This student’s comment appears on the attached student evaluation report and is rendered below in full.

“I like the structure of the course; It is well organized and straight forward. However, i am not in agreement with the 40pt deduction on previous assignments for an "absence". The entire point of me taking an online class is because i work a lot and i do not have time to "attend" anything. Sometimes I just do not get time to do a small assignment or two because i just worked an 80 hour week and never got home before midnight in order to do anything other than go to bed so i can be up at 5am the next day to go back to work. I understand that I am not the best student, but at the same time i do not appreciate an A paper being deducted to a C paper just because i did not write a two sentence response to one of my peers that is worth 5 points. This is like being charged a \$40 fine for missing or being late to a dentist appointment, it just doesn't make

sense to me. I can understand to a point that my participation on some assignments affects other people because these assignments require me to put forth opinions about other people's work, so I can see there be some portion of a participation grade there. However, even if this is the case, 40 points in deductions on work that has already been done and graded is absolutely ridiculous and needs to be adjusted.”

Some context needs to be provided here: my grading scale is designed on a 1,000 points total, so 40 pts. for absence were deducted in relation to that cumulative number. After some careful consideration, I recognized that my grading policy needed some adjustment. This comment prompted me to revisit my grading policies in this online course and all other courses I teach. In doing so, I consulted a study authored by Walvoord, Barbara E. Fassler, and Virginia Johnson Anderson. *Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment in College*. Jossey-Bass, 2010. This book provided me with some additional tools for evaluating student work and offered an in-depth examination of the link between teaching and grading. As a result, I have revised my absence policies in my current online courses. Specifically, those 40 points for absence are no longer deducted. In addition, the weight of the all assignments, including peer responses has been revisited and the weight has been redistributed to better reflect the task and effort required for their completion. I am grateful to my students' comments as they help me reevaluate my grading policies, design balanced assessment, and ensure equitable grading practices.