



EASTERN OREGON
UNIVERSITY

To: Personnel Review Committees
From: Peter Maille *PM*
Date: December 2, 2019

RE: Teaching Observation Report for Wilson Zehr

I had the privilege of observing Wilson Zehr in the classroom for his 3rd year review, and am pleased to offer my observations now, two years later. To prepare this memo I examined Wilson's syllabus for BA 313 Principles of Finance, the supporting Canvas shell for the online version of the class, and I observed a classroom session with eight students beginning at 1:30 PM on October 19th in Zabel 107.

By way of overview, Wilson began the session with a feedback session for the future. Specifically, he explained that he had observed students were working on homework assignments during class, and was concerned about comprehension. For about 10 minutes he led a discussion that generated some thoughtful exchanges between himself and the students. After that he introduced the content for the session—calculating the return on an investment and making investment choices—with mention of last week's discussions and then looking into coming lectures.

Throughout the lesson Wilson relied on a PowerPoint presentation to illustrate points and ensure that the entire class stayed together. What follows is my assessment as per the guidelines for classroom review as part of the promotion and tenure process detailed in the Faculty Handbook.

A. Communication Skills

Wilson spoke clearly and he was easily heard throughout the class. The back and forth he initiated during the leadoff feedback session resulted in thoughtful feedback from the students, and what seemed like a sincere exchange between Wilson and the students. Wilson actively appreciated student's comments even when they were contradictory.

While Wilson communicated with students well in the classroom, interestingly I think that Wilson's energy and talent are revealed most clearly online. For example, he has an introductory letter online that I think does an excellent job of presenting himself as someone with a solid relevant experience who cares. His note ties together the topic of the course, his background, and personal interests in a way that is exemplary.

B. Knowledge of and Enthusiasm for Subject and Teaching

Wilson's grasp of the material is very good. He has about 25 years of experience, has accumulated substantial graduate-level education, and as someone pursuing their PhD is actively

engaged in research. Finance is a relatively mechanical topic at the undergraduate level and Wilson's delivery of the ideas in his lecture, be it the initial presentation, handling of questions, or explanation of exercise he stepped through leave no doubt in my mind that he is fluent in the material.

C. Relevance of Content to Lesson

There were two elements present in this classroom lesson. First was the open discussion intended to smooth out lectures for the remainder of the course and inform future courses. In terms of strict content this had little to do with calculating the return on investment. However, it is relevant to the greater conduct of the course, thus, not out of place. It was important to set this portion of the lecture apart by introducing it carefully, and then closing it carefully before moving into the days content. I think that Wilson did this effectively.

The content of the lesson was precisely on target, as one would expect for a specific topic of this nature. I suppose that one could allow the discussion to stray from the topic of the lesson, but Wilson's discussion and PowerPoint presentation focused the content nicely.

Although not related to a single lecture, the online version of this class is also on target and very well-developed. Each week includes an assignment, and a graded discussion that are tightly related.

D. Attitudes Towards Students

Throughout the class, it was apparent that Wilson has established a close relationship with his students. He was able to call on them by name. He checked in on progress when they were making calculations. He engaged in good back-and-forth as they moved through the exercise. Importantly, I saw the majority of students paying close attention and responding in a relaxed manner when prompted with a question. Scanning through the language Wilson uses to deliver assignments to his online students, I think he succeeds in conveying energy and informality that our online students appreciate.

E. Pedagogy

Wilson's delivery of the content in the class session I observed was based on a sample problem presented with PowerPoint slides. The slides were clear and simple. I found the example to be about right in terms of complexity. First came some general ideas about making an investment decision—the idea of “return on investment”. This was followed by some discussion of how to account for time when valuing different cash streams, and we concluded with a discussion of accounting for risk. The example presented via PowerPoint illustrated all of these points effectively. Wilson prompted students to calculate values using Excel at points along the discussion and these exercises indicated that the students had a good grasp of the problem and expectations.

The online version of this class follows the classroom section closely. I think that a few features of the online section communicate a strong online teacher. Across weeks Wilson's modules are

consistent. This is valued by online students who are often constrained by work/family schedules and value regularity in the delivery of a course. I also see bi-weekly exams. Having exams this often signals a serious commitment to student learning. Lastly, Wilson has adjusted his Fall class to conform with the odd 11-week structure of Fall term. This requires a substantial effort to ensure there are no bad cross-references, missing assignments, or gaps.

By way of constructive feedback, I would suggest the following. I observed that there were one or two students who did not have their laptop computers, and therefore, did not participate in the Excel-based exercises. If this is a regular occurrence I would suggest that the students form groups so that all can participate in the exercises. There were a few times when Wilson seemed to jump back and forth in the material. Given that this observation comes during week nine I think that this is a minor issue in that Wilson and the students have developed a certain familiarity with each other. However, I think that the lectures could be made easier to follow, especially early in the term, by adding more detail/structure to the PowerPoint presentation. This is one of the most important functions of PowerPoint and I think that Wilson's lectures would become slightly more deliberate if he followed a more detailed and regimented series of PowerPoint slides.

Overall, in my review of materials and my classroom observation I find that Wilson demonstrates good teaching skills, a clear command of the material, and a commitment to our students. I see no reason to expect that he will not continue to develop as an EOU faculty member. We are fortunate to have him as part of our team, and based on my observations I support his promotion to Associate Professor.