



November 3, 2017

Dear David:

Thank you so much for letting me sit in on two of your Introduction to World Religions classes. I really enjoyed the lecture, the discussion and the materials you shared online. You asked for a short review of your teaching – and that (besides a thank you!) is the purpose of this letter.

Two qualities stand out the most from watching you teach. The first is enthusiasm. You speak from a place of open interest and respect for these different cultures. Even when you are joking about some of the unusual practices (so different from what these students know!) you show the utmost respect for their practices as meaningful to *them*. I think that teaching a course like this could be an open opportunity for a teacher to put his own spin or bias onto students, but the only bias I saw was toward better understanding and respect for diverse peoples.

The second quality I noticed is deep knowledge of the religion and a willingness to be honest when a student question went *beyond* your experience or expertise. I can see that you know there are words and concepts you need to give background on or define as you go. That helps, especially when vocabulary is so unknown to students. Today you showed a video on an artist who posits that worship does not necessarily need to be in the presence of an icon, but a well-rendered picture of the deity could elicit the same response. You stopped the video purposefully throughout to ask questions like: What gods and goddesses might she represent that are important to Hindus? and What different objects do you see in her artwork that represent Maa Lakshmi? (they saw coins, the lotus, elephants, etc).

Talking with you after both classes, I get a sense that you read the students and their needs well, for example, knowing that a student needed to get notes or updates from a student after missing a couple days of class. Your understand that they might need to talk a little bit throughout the class for this purpose shows students that you “get” them.

I also heard from you that you would like to get them talking more, but the challenges of time, language acquisition level (there are many international students in this course!), and space make that challenging. You engage them often, asking questions, taking comments, describing concepts in detail, relating to what they know. Your use of technology throughout the lesson is very effective, moving seamlessly back and forth between the Blackboard page, straightforward discussion and lecture, interesting videos and helpful websites.

My one suggestion, and I shared this with you, is to tell stories. Your experiences are vast and the people you have interacted with could come alive and draw your students into the reality of these religions. Share pictures with them of your travels, even just a couple. I know you said that

it's been a long time since you have traveled to some of these places, but let them get a kick out of seeing the Younger Dr. Aune, pictures of the Himalayas, even music, any artifacts or souvenirs you brought back. Drawing in more than one mode of learning adds engagement. It may inspire them to consider traveling to one or more of these places.

Thank you again for letting me sit in on your lessons in Hinduism and for your suggestion that I call one of the Cleveland Hindu Temples to visit before my trip to India this coming summer. I will do that soon.

It is always good to see you and bask in your smile.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jen".

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