

Bernadette's peer evaluation of Ben Holt
January 18, 2024

Even though it was at 8:00 in the morning, I enjoyed and was humbled to sit in on Ben's Math 95 class on November 2, 2023.

I arrived to class at 7:55, and Ben was writing information about our food pantry on the board, including the place and the phone number to call. That information stayed on the board for the duration of the class, even though space was limited on his one small whiteboard. I asked Ben about that later, and he said he leaves these announcements written on the board so students can discretely write it down while the lecture is happening. SO brilliant and caring.

Ben also was offering extra credit if class evaluations go above 80%. He looked up the percentage there in class, and the class was at 70%.

Ben took roll at 7:58 so he was ready to go when the clock (projected onto the screen) struck 8:00.

He began with a "big picture" story about René Descartes, how algebra and geometry are connected. He also provided some shorthand for students to use in their notes: Eq'n = equation.

He also gave a break to his class a couple of times, saying "you don't have to take notes on this – it's just for your appreciation," and gave examples of how Earth's orbit is also an ellipse, just like the ellipses they were discussing in class.

Ben does a great job of providing meaning to his material, his delivery is engaging, and he does a GREAT job of incorporating his projected lecture notes into his whiteboard drawings (when he scrolls his notes down, the prepared images match what he's drawn almost exactly). He knows his material inside-out, and he's also expert in getting the material across to his students in his lecture, while providing bonus material on the Earth's orbit and where to find food if you need it. Ben said he wanted to "break the cycle of lecturing" because it was the path of least resistance for him and his students since Covid, and I think the lecturing approach works well, and it would be okay if he continued what I saw in my observation. *But* if Ben is not happy with that and it could lead to burnout, I'd suggest that he at least *try* a different approach (asking students to do homework by watching some videos that go over the class content before class starts, for instance), and see if his students rise to the occasion.

I have a couple of suggestions for improvement.

- There were new podiums crowding the back of the already-small classroom, and the air temperature was COLD. I discussed with Ben the possibility of having a dedicated classroom that has more whiteboard space.
- I discussed with Ben the possibility of calling on people who were quiet in his class. He had one "talker" and a couple other students would chime in sometimes, but the rest of the class was really quiet. Ben had a good reason for not calling on people (and I forget what that was since our chat in November).

Like I said, this was a pleasure, and I'm grateful for the chance to see Ben teach and I was grateful for our in-person debrief afterward.