Category II Narrative

Michael Rhoads

This past year has been a challenging and unique year due to the pandemic. As a faculty member at Metropolitan State University of Denver, this has meant being adaptive and flexible in an effort to best meet the needs of our students. This year I gained experience teaching online, I participated in professional development focused on remote learning, and I conducted research with students.

As a Category II Lecturer, my primary role is teaching. Growing up in a household of teachers, this is a position I am very passionate about. This past fall I taught three sections of PSY 2310 Statistics for the Social and Behavioral Sciences, two sections of PSY 3010 Research Methods in Psychological Science, and one section of PSY 3011 The Lab for Research Methods in Psychological Science. Historically, these can be difficult classes to teach because of the content. However, I enjoyed the challenge of designing these classes in ways that were engaging and interesting for students. “**Courses are designed and delivered using multiple approaches to facilitate student learning”.** I utilized a number of active learning strategies to make the content more engaging and manageable. Some of these activities include discussion boards, collaborative group activities, and paper peer-reviews. Additionally, I designed PSY 3010 Research Methods in an effort to tap into the “testing effect”. I created quizzes with large question banks which had unlimited attempts with the goal of encouraging students to take the quizzes multiple times as a way of learning through retrieval-practice. As well, each of the five exams were cumulative with progressive scoring. Since each exam covered all prior material and was worth more points, students were incentivized to retake quizzes and utilize the skeletal notes I provided.

**“Courses follow the official course syllabus (i.e., Regular Course Syllabus) and the Category II Faculty member adheres to university policies regarding ADA accommodations”.** Each year I review the RCS documents. One example of how I met these guidelines is in teaching PSY 3011 The Lab. This course involves having students learn about statistics and research methods by completing weekly labs. To this end, I assisted students in learning how to use statistical software (Jamovi) for data analysis. As needed, I met with students through Microsoft Teams to assist them with the lab. One example of how I met University policy is by recording lectures using Yuja software so that the lectures offer Closed Captions and are in compliance with ADA guidelines.

Overall, I believe students learned a lot in the courses I taught. “**Student Ratings of Instruction (SRIs)… should show an overall median of 4.0 or higher for the current evaluation period.”**This view is supported by my Student Ratings of Instruction (SRI’s).

For PSY 2310\_3, my median SRI for Question 1 (Course as a Whole) was 5.00. For Question 2 (Faculty Contribution to the Course), the median rating was 5.00. For PSY 2310\_4, my median SRI for Question 1 (Course as a Whole) was 6.00. For Question 2 (Faculty Contribution to the Course), the median rating was 6.00. For PSY 2310\_5, my median SRI for Question 1 (Course as a Whole) was 5.00. For Question 2 (Faculty Contribution to the Course), the median rating was 6.00. I am currently teaching three sections of PSY 3010 Research Methods for Psychological Science and two sections of PSY 3010 The Lab for Research Methods in Psychological Science. However, I don’t have SRI’s for these courses yet.

**“An annual Formative Peer Observation, conducted by the Department Chair or designee, address strong pedagogy to facilitate student learning”.** The observation that was conducted by the department chair (Dr. Curl) provides further evidence of my strong pedagogy in facilitating student learning. For all criteria that Dr. Curl was able to observe virtually, I received a mark for “yes, meets expectations.” However, I recognize this year was atypical with an observation that was not conducted in-person. Therefore, I continue to pursue methods to improve my teaching through reflection, conversation with colleagues, and professional development opportunities.

“**Category II Faculty members use professional expertise along with course and/or program assessment results to improve courses”.** In an effort to advance my professional expertise in teaching, I attend conferences and professional development seminars. Due to the pandemic, I was not able to attend any conferences in person. However, I did attend a virtual teaching conference hosted by the National Institute for the Teaching of Psychology’s (NITOP) teaching conference. Although the conference was not quite as enriching as the in-person version, I still found it valuable to hear about and discuss cutting-edge approaches to teaching in the field of psychology.

In an effort to grow as an online instructor, I took part in a couple of professional development programs. First, I prepared for the transition from the Blackboard to Canvas learning management system by completing the Advanced Canvas Training 2020 hosted by the MSU Denver Center for Teaching, Learning and Design. Second, I am in the process of completing a certification through the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE) to gain knowledge and expertise about Effective Online Teaching Practices.

Beyond my teaching, I also conducted research with the help of student research assistants. Due to COVID restrictions, conducting research during 2020 came with many challenges. Luckily, I was already engaged in a project that didn’t require in-person contact. With the assistance of three research assistants, I coded articles for a meta-analysis on the benefits of yoga therapy for depression. It has been enjoyable and rewarding to involve undergraduate students in this process, along with helping them to learn more about the research process. With the assistance of Nels Grevstad in the Math department, we are wrapping up data analysis and plan to submit a manuscript for publication by the end of the semester.

In summary, I grew as a teacher and researcher this past year. While 2020 provided many obstacles, I did my best to adapt and stay flexible in a challenging situation. With courses taking place online, I sought to optimize this situation by taking part in multiple professional development programs focused on effective online teaching. While I have experienced growth as an instructor this past year, I also recognize areas where I still have room to grow. In reviewing student comments from SRIs along with reflecting on lessons from the ACUE course, I recognize that I can do more to engage students and facilitate their learning. For remote learning, I can do this by incorporating some synchronous learning opportunities. Additionally, redesigning discussion boards to emphasize authentic and valuable interactions is critical. Finally, as we prepare to transition back to in-person teaching, there are areas of this teaching modality I plan to work on. These areas include delivering lectures at an appropriate pace, speaking more slowly, and using more humor in the classroom.