From: Joleen Togawa Salas
To: Composition 190-003
Date: February 25, 2010
Subject: Report on REL 348 (Religion, Politics, & Society)

Introduction

University of Hawai'i at Manoa's 2010 spring semester offers a three-credit course entitled Religion, Politics, & Society (REL 348). This course satisfies both the Ethics (E) and Oral (O) requirements that are necessary for graduation. Pre-requisites for this class are REL 150 or 151, or by consent. This semester, REL 348 meets every Tuesday from 2:30 PM – 5:00 PM in the Hawaii Institute of Geophysics building (HIG) in room 311. REL 348 is taught by Ramdas Lamb.

Noteworthy Findings

REL 348 explores the different American “perspectives and approaches” in terms of how religion, politics and society in America relate to one another in which controversial and ethical issues can surface. Since the course also satisfies a speech requirement, the class is conducted in an interactive manner wherein the students and instructor discuss ethical topics from assigned readings.

The readings assigned can be accessed on the online class website. Examples of the readings include: Navigating Language and Cultural Differences, Health Care, Drug Legalization, Free Speech, Capital Punishment, and Euthanasia. In preparation for discussion, students are expected to do the reading assignments before the class meets again. Students are also expected to think critically and analyze situations from every view possible.

As REL 348 is not a required course, the syllabus stresses that students who are thinking about enrolling in the class should prepare to be “exposed to, expected to listen to, and asked to discuss rationally points of view that differ from their own” as some of the topics may be offensive to an individual's personal views. Because it is a speech class, writing assignments are rarely assigned and make up just ten percent of the grade. The two exams each make up twenty-five percent of the grade, while class participation makes up forty percent.

This semester, the REL 348 class is made up of students from a variety of backgrounds—Asian, European, American, Filipino, and other ethnic groups. Regardless, all gather every Tuesday in HIG 311 to discuss intensively American religion, politics and society.

Once class starts, the instructor asks the students to define a term they had discussed during the last session and the students know immediately to take out a pen and paper and write their answers down. Even before class begins, the students have the chairs situated in a circle, since they know they will be engaging in discussion throughout the entire two hours and thirty minutes. After their short writing assignment, the instructor chooses a student to recite to the class his or her interpretation of the reading assignment paragraph by paragraph. The students are encouraged to interpret from the texts, rather than just reading aloud.

While the student continues to give his or her interpretations, the instructor would interrupt when he felt a significant topic should be addressed or further elaborated by simply cutting of the student who was reading and bring the class back together by engaging in a brief discussion on that particular topic. After the discussion, the student would innately continue his/her interpretations while the rest of the
class continued to listen. But by doing this, he involves the other students within this interpretation and allows them to express their views on the matter as well. This cycle of choosing a student to read and interpret while having other students partake in discussions with each other and the instructor continues throughout the class. Since the time period of the class is considerably long, a five-minute break is taken after the first hour and a half.

**Recommendations**

Personally, I recommend taking REL 348 because at the same time it satisfies two requirements in order to graduate, it also enables one to think openly and critically about views that may never occur to one on a regular basis. As the pre-requisites vary among REL 150, 151 or by consent, it is recommended to enroll in one of these courses before taking REL 348. Additionally, as the syllabus states, one should prepare an open-mind while enrolled in this course.

**Meta-commentary**

Initially, I did not choose to observe this particular class, as it is very related to my first two papers since it involves “religion.” However, I did consider it in the beginning, since I am currently taking another class that Professor Lamb teaches and find it considerably interesting. Nevertheless, I tried my best to broaden my options, by originally choosing a *Screenplay Writing* class and then a *Introduction to Social Work* class.

Regardless, I enjoyed visiting this class and found myself engaged in it, as if I was an actual student. There were many times where I had to pull myself away from this “student” mode back into the “observer” mode. The instructor even made this a little difficult for me, as he involved me in the discussion.

New Meta-commentary: I tried to elaborate on the instructor's tone of voice when he would interrupt a student, but I'm not sure I captured what you were looking for.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting approved for a class to observe</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>Gathering course catalog; gathering professors' contact information; sending emails to professors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asking Professor Lamb at the last minute</td>
<td>2 minutes</td>
<td>Finding out if the professor is currently teaching an upper division course; finding out it only meets once a week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review of Syllabus</td>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td>Gathering information from the syllabus; reviewing the class website; overview of assigned readings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class observation composition</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>Observation of class and trying to take note of every thing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proofreading/Revising</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
<td>Correcting apparent errors</td>
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