

CLASS OBSERVATION by Robert Spitzer, Distinguished Service Professor, Political Science

CLASS: Prof. Eric Edlund, PHY 203, 201online classes

DATE: May 7, 2020

In an effort observe close-up effective online teaching techniques, I electronically sat in on two of Prof. Edlund's Physics classes: PHY 203 (on May 4) and PHY 201 (on May 6). Each was a 50 minute class. PHY 203 was smaller enrollment than the 201, which had over 20 present out of 26. Let me emphasize that I possess absolutely no knowledge of the subject matter of these classes (especially since I traded my particle accelerator for a lawn mower a few years ago). But good teaching is good teaching, and I know it when I see it. That's what I saw in Edlund's two classes.

Edlund utilized Teams for the classes. He began in an informal way by asking the students how well they had dealt with the previous class's assignment, and some students replied in both classes. He also recapped a couple of key points from the previous class, and gave a brief preview of what was to come. Each class was well organized. He finished both classes with a preview of the subject for the next class.

The meat of both live classes involved his use of paper and pen, viewable to the student by a webcam located overhead (very much like an Elmo) so that he could write and speak to explain (in the case of 201) collisions in the context of explaining kinetic energy. His example, carried over from the previous class, was the meteor crash that led to the extinction of most dinosaurs (60 million years ago?) on Earth. In the 203 class, most of his writing was equations, whereas for 201 Edlund wrote more descriptive notes, though also equations. In both instances, the writing was legible and, married to his ongoing accompanying animated discussion/explanation of what he was writing, was quite vivid. He also called on students to answer specific questions about what he was explaining. They responded effectively and in ways that advanced the class lesson. Edlund also showed an interesting piece of film (only a few seconds) to illustrate his larger lesson about colliding objects. He also worked a problem on paper and asked the students to solve it and offer answers, which he discussed. It was a good interactive moment.

As best I could tell, the online format of the class not only did not impede learning, but I actually felt I had the kind of experience that I would have had were I sitting in his classroom. Edlund displayed vigorous stylistic and content versatility. His manner is pleasingly conversational, but full of content. He responded effectively and constructively to every student response and query, regardless of the student comments' accuracy. It was abundantly clear to me that Edlund is extremely knowledgeable, highly enthusiastic (despite the limitations of the medium of transmission), extremely responsive, and flexible in adapting to the ebb and flow of both classes. Edlund is, in all, a superb classroom instructor and academic.