TEACHING OBSERVATION REPORT

Observee: Richard Nugent
Observer: Matthew Baker

Observation Date: April 4th, 2014
Observation Course: Eco 221-Economic Statistics I

Richard teaches his class between 11:10 and 12:25 on Tuesdays and Fridays. I paid a visit to Steven's class on September 30th, and stayed for approximately 30 minutes. The class meets in the basement of the Hunter North building. Class was well-attended and started on time – in fact, as far as I could tell, every possible seat in the room was taken.

Richard began class by laying out several assignments and due dates, which he did in a plain and clear fashion. This suggests that he is well-organized and careful in defining what he expects from the students. In terms of lecture material, Richard's task for the day was to introduce the central limit theorem and explain its application. The general principle is quite difficult to explain (more on this below), but Richard explained the subject with care. He didn't linger on the general theory, but instead emphasized its application in statistics. He worked some examples of building confidence intervals with varying sample sizes to emphasize the point of his lecture.

Throughout his presentation, Richard did a nice job soliciting questions (and answers) from students, and students appeared engaged throughout. At one point, he paused the lecture while students worked out an example; this seemed to be an effective teaching device. His lecture style is primarily "chalk-and-talk", which imbued his lecture with what I thought was a good pace for the material. His presentation style and pace are easy to follow and I think he has made a very good decision in using the chalkboard, and not power point slides, in presenting the material.

Even from my brief visit, it is clear that Richard is well on his way to being a great teacher, and that we are lucky to have him at Hunter! He has an easy-going, relaxed style, and is easy to follow and understand. My only suggestion might be something he is already doing (especially if he does this in some lectures but not others!): use the computer in class to give students quick examples of some principles. Here is one example that I think goes a long way that I have used in my teaching to explain the central limit theorem. The idea is to quickly show the students what the CLT means and that it in fact works: 1) roll a six-sided dice 40 times (simulated in Excel) 2) Repeat the 40-roll experiment 100 times. 3) For each of the 100 40-roll data sets, calculate the mean. 4) Plot a histogram of the 100 means, which look approximately bell-shaped. From this example, students can see that "averages are approximately normally distributed" even though the data generation process – dice rolling – has nothing to do with a normal distribution.

Dr. Matthew J. Baker