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Discovering Other Teachers

by Emily O. Gravett

Last March, I had the good fortune of participating in the CFI's [Discovering Other Teachers](#), a new program we designed to create the opportunity for instructors to visit each other's classes. At the time, my primary reason for signing up was because this was a program that my team was piloting and I thought it would be a good idea for me to have some first-hand experience with it. I signed up to visit a few different classes, including Human Geography one early Thursday morning, taught by ISAT's [Dr. Carole Nash](#).

I know Carole through her work with the CFI (she was a long-time [faculty associate](#), a [jmuDESIGN](#) facilitator, and has done a great deal for this university in terms of [place-based research and education](#)), so I was excited to see her in action. As it turns out, Carole was beginning her Geography of Religion unit that very day, which was a wonderful coincidence, as I teach religion myself. (In truth, I had no idea that "geography of religion" was even a thing!) I loved learning from her take on the subject, eavesdropping on student conversations, and contributing even, at her invitation, to parts of the class discussion.

My experience sitting in on Human Geography was very different from other [classroom observations](#) I've been a part of in the past. For instance, I'm often invited to provide formative feedback for colleagues on their teaching or the PAC has scheduled visits to my own classes to make sure things aren't going terribly awry. (They aren't...usually.) In Carole's class, the goal was to just sit back and enjoy.

A happy outcome of attending Carole's class was that I came away inspired by some of the teaching choices she had made—and I intend to try some out in my own course this semester:

- Post an agenda for the day, either on the board or the projector (e.g., Carole used a PPT slide)
- Remind students where in the syllabus or the course outline they are, how this particular day or unit fits in, and where they're headed (e.g., Carole had written on the board all of the previous units, highlighting where the Geography of Religion was and how it would segue into later units)
- Connect what students are learning on one day or in one course to the rest of the major (e.g., Carole explained that there are whole courses in the major for several of the units in this class and how this course served basically as an overview for the rest of the major)
- Clarify goals for the class session (e.g., Carole posted three specific goals for the day, including "analyze effects of globalization on religious practice")

- Bring in relevant current events, news stories, etc. (e.g., Carole mentioned to students an NPR “Science Friday” story she had heard, which was relevant to the day’s topic)
- Connect the course material not just to current events, but to the local context (e.g., Carole made mention of how Harrisonburg’s weird March weather may affect the local fruit crops)
- Prime student discussions with graphics and images (e.g., Carole showed some maps and some Pew survey results on current religious demographics in the United States and asked students to share observations and explanations for the phenomena)
- Provide hard copies of worksheets, with specific questions and prompts, for students to fill out, based on their own thinking as well as talking with their peers

I am grateful to Carole and the other instructors who so generously opened up their classrooms to colleagues in the spring. I learned so much—and I know others who visited did too. [Sign-ups](#) for this semester’s Discovering Other Teachings program are now open. I encourage you to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to see our amazing colleagues in action.

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