

**Peer Observation
Online Classes**

Peer Observer	Shawn Spano
Course Instructor	Nick Coburn-Palo
Course Title and Number	Mediation Theory & Practice, COMM 116P
Instructional Mode	Synchronous
Semester/Year	Fall, 2020
Date of Observation/Material Examination	November 5 thru November 24
Date of Instructor/Observer Conversations	November 5

The following materials were reviewed and inform this evaluation

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Canvas site	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Textbook/readings
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Syllabus prepared by instructor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Course discussion boards
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Class handouts prepared by instructor	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Student activities/assignments
<input type="checkbox"/>	Videos prepared by instructor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other course resources
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Synchronous course session	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other: _____

1. Quality of Syllabus:

The Communication Studies Department uses a common template for syllabi. Professor Coburn-Palo's syllabus adheres to the template, including all the required information in clear and accessible language (student learning outcomes, course assignments and grading scale, semester schedule, etc.). I especially liked the semester schedule. It is organized simply but effectively, with each week's topic, assignment and deliverables clearly listed.

2. Clarity of Communication:

Professor Coburn-Palo's written communication on Canvas is clear and easy to follow. For example, a course summary is provided on the home page listing each week's assignment in chronological order. The assignment instructions themselves are clearly written. Professor Coburn-Palo's oral communication in the weekly Zoom sessions is equally clear, in addition to being spirited and engaging.

3. Organization:

Professor Coburn-Palo's has organized the course primarily around Assignments and Announcements. As noted above, the homepage lists each assignment by date, which matches what is included in the Assignment tab. Professor Coburn-Palo also makes ample use of Announcements to provide updates, additional assignment and activity instructions, and recordings of the weekly Zoom sessions. I know other instructors who organize their

synchronous and asynchronous courses into weekly Modules (using the Modules tab). Professor Coburn-Palo might consider adopting that approach in the future.

4. Relevance of the module or session observed to Course Description and Objectives and overall Course Curriculum:

The Course Learning Objectives (CLOs) for Comm 116P are clearly listed on the syllabus, and are consistent with the Department's Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for "Practice" courses as well as the COMM 116P course description. All of these objectives, both the specific ones for 116P and the broader Department PLOs, are addressed in the course curriculum, readings, activities and assignments. Professor Coburn-Palo should also consider linking the CLOs to the assignments on the syllabus. That is, for each assignment identify the CLOs that are being addressed.

5. Knowledge of Subject Matter:

Professor Coburn-Palo's demonstrates a remarkably deep understanding of mediation. He brings a wealth of practical mediation experience to the classroom, and packages that for students into conceptual frameworks. As such, he is able to traverse smoothly between theory and practice. While Professor Coburn-Palo's command of the subject matter was on display throughout the classroom Zoom session I observed, I was particularly impressed with how he demonstrated his knowledge spontaneously in response to student questions and comments. For example, he discussed the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the 1960's counter-culture protests in response to student comments, making insightful links to the reading and topic (i.e. mediation and the desire for revenge). Overall, Professor Coburn-Palo's knowledge of mediation is impressive.

6. Quality of Interaction with Students:

Professor Coburn-Palo worked diligently to promote discussion and interaction with students during the Zoom session I observed. By all accounts, he was successful. Importantly, the quality of the interaction was outstanding. For example, there were several multiple-turn exchanges where Professor Coburn-Palo and the students went back and forth on a topic, with Professor Coburn-Palo elaborating and connecting key points. He consistently "checks in" on students to ensure they are they tracking and absorbing the information. Overall, Professor Coburn-Palo is an excellent classroom facilitator.

7. Student Engagement/Ability of Instructor to Stimulate Interest:

Professor Coburn-Palo is a master at engaging students and stimulating interest. For example, he used part of the classroom Zoom session to facilitate "open discussion" with the full class, inviting students to participate by unmuting themselves or using the chat function. He then switched over to a "structured go around," calling on each student to answer questions from the weekly discussion. I found this to be an effective way to involve students and stimulate interest. Professor Coburn-Palo also assigns a variety of readings, assignments and activities on Canvas, another great way to keep students engaged. Finally, Professor Coburn-Palo's communication and facilitation performance is itself engaging. He is energetic and passionate about the content. He is remarkably present, giving students his undivided attention,

demonstrating that he cares and is interested in them. He also brings a wonderful combination of seriousness and playfulness to the Zoom classroom. Overall, the session I observed was spirited, with lots of quality engagement, interaction and participation.

8. Handling of Questions:

By my count, eight different students asked questions during the session I observed. In each case, Professor Coburn-Palo responded in ways that validated the student and clarified, corrected or elaborated on the question. For example, he responded to one student's question, saying, "allow me to be a bit contrary, and push back on the assumption you are making." Importantly, the student responded positively to this gentle but firm attempt to correct them. In other cases, Professor Coburn-Palo redirected student questions back to them, doing this strategically to highlight a particular point or open a new line of discussion. For example, in a lively discussion on mediation and revenge, he asked the students, "Is it always wrong to seek revenge?" This prompt stimulated additional student discussion and questions, creating a counter-intuitive perspective for students to respond to.

9. Stimulation of Higher Order Thinking Skills (application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation):

There is a clear focus in Professor Coburn-Palo COMM 116P course on linking theory to practice. The theory is addressed primarily in the weekly discussion question assignments that are linked to the readings. These assignments are great for facilitating analysis, synthesis and evaluation skills. The Mediation Role Play and the Mediation Engagement Project assignments, on the other hand, enable students to develop their application skills, which is essential to the Department's Practice courses. The Mediation Engagement Project, in particular, is an excellent application assignment. Students are told that they "will leverage the knowledge gained from the course readings while engaging in a negotiation simulation," which is "modeled after the same one international diplomats are tested on by the United Nation's in-house university system, UNITAR." I think this type of "real world" application enhances and deepens student learning. Overall, Professor Coburn-Palo's COMM 116P course has substance and rigor. He is challenging students at an appropriate level for upper-division course work in the major.

10. Additional Recommendations:

No additional recommendations needed. Professor Coburn-Palo is doing a great job teaching the course.

11. Describe any unfavorable conditions in the learning environment beyond the control of the instructor:

N/A

12. Discuss additional circumstances relevant to the particular course

COMM 116P is an upper-division election, populated primarily by junior and senior-level Communication Studies majors.

Check either A or B:

X A. This direct observation was conducted as part of the **evaluation** of effectiveness in teaching as required by University and/or Department policy. (Provide this review to the faculty member and the department chair within 15 working days of the date of this direct observation.)

 B. This direct observation was conducted for **formative** purposes and it will not be retained in any personnel action file, shared with anyone besides the faculty member who requested it, and it will not be used in faculty evaluation.