



**COLLEGE OF
LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES**

Department of History

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Classroom Visit Report

14 October, 2009

Dear Gabriel Baker,

Thank you for allowing me to visit one of your discussion sections for Western Civ. II. I was very interested to learn how the reading and lecture materials of the course would translate into a smaller classroom, with the possibility of give-and-take, and with a chance for the students to pose questions. I was quite impressed by what I saw.

The class was well attended. At the outset you began a review of some major themes, some of them connecting the current topic to other, earlier themes, in such a way, I felt sure, that must have been helpful to the students. The course ranges so widely over various materials that it can be difficult to pull things together. Throughout the session, you used a series of PowerPoint slides, to provide an outline of the materials you wanted to cover. The slides were a visible reminder of where the discussion stood relative to your overall plan, but did not intrude on the discussions or dominate the activity. I thought that this was a good way to keep things on track and to help guide the students toward major themes. The only suggestion I might offer is to allow more time for discussion of the original sources, which tend to be more complex and to require more examination and explanation than the lecture or textbook materials.

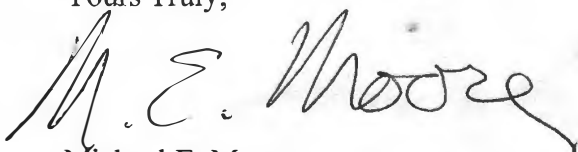
This session was on Martin Luther. The tack that you followed was to connect Luther's religious impact to earlier disquiet within the European religious scene; the development of new forms of piety, the impact of literacy, and the rise of new 'outsider' religious groups such as the Lollards and Hussites. The students were well-versed in the readings and able to help you put together a narrative of these earlier instances of religious disquiet and change. Some of the credit for a good session must always go to the students, who in this case were well-prepared and willing to join in. However, it is a really good indication that your teaching efforts are paying off.

I thought that your presentation was very much to the point, and demonstrated a good knowledge of the topic. Clearly the students recognized you as the leader of the discussion and had

confidence that you were teaching something valuable about the past and useful in the context of the course. When it came to questions and discussion, I was very pleased to note that you have worked out an effective style of teaching: confident and relaxed, in command of the material, and guiding the class with a good level of energy. I would say that more than 15, perhaps close to 20 students were brought into the discussion, which was a really high proportion. You are talented at posing questions, encouraging the students to go farther in their answers, and getting them to really dig into the material. You put the students at ease, and a sense of mutual respect was quite evident. The discussion was wide-ranging, over relevant topics such as the impact of the printing press, the mental world of Christian Humanism, mounting criticism of the church, all of which led back to Luther's own ideas and writings. Thus in this session the students were helped to contextualize the Reformation, and to understand Luther's basic attitudes, interests and doctrines. Despite the range of topics and problems that were raised, the entire session was carefully planned and guided, and in a manner that seemed quite natural.

So Gabe, thank you for making such a valuable contribution to the class, and helping us put together a successful semester!

Yours Truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. E. Moore". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final "e".

Michael E. Moore

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