Interview Example

Interviewer: This is a faculty interview with a university professor at the University of Connecticut. If you could talk a little bit about some of the ways that you’ve adapted your teaching to some of the more diverse students you’ve had in your classroom.

Professor: Well, sure. I’ll give you some framework of the types of students that I am teaching. I teach both juniors and seniors in a teacher preparation program and also teach masters level students both in the teacher prep program and in other programs within the school. One of the things that I found the first time I went to teach that course, specifically in the area of educational assessment, was that there was a wide range of ability coming in, background knowledge, understanding of education, special education. And some of the preconceived notions that I had, I guess, about that background knowledge really required me to adjust not only the content of the lectures but also the assessments and how I went about business.

Another, and I’ll talk about that in a second, but another major piece that I was struck by as I started teaching, I went to use the Power Point program, Power Point slides, and I found that that was very helpful for me in terms of my own organization. But what I quickly realized after a class and a half was that students were trying to write down everything that was being put up on the screen and they weren’t really able to concentrate on what the message was or what the concept was behind the bullets. Coincidentally after the first lecture I had two students who came up to me and identified themselves as students with learning disabilities and asked for copies of the Power Point slides. And I provided that to them. And another student who did not identify herself as having a learning disability but just asked for them. So I gave them to those three students. And in the second class I realized that those three students were able to concentrate on me more and the other students were, had their heads down and were scribbling away. So from that point on I just printed out copies of all the slides and distributed them at the beginning of the class. And what I found is that there’s certainly the risk of having students tune out and not listen to you. But you know the key is that you have to structure the slides so that you’re not reading from them verbatim. You have bullets or key points and then you can have examples that they need to be keying in on as they listen to you. And I’ve had multiple students in different classes tell me face to face and in evaluations that having the outlines and having the Power Point slides has been extremely helpful in helping focus their attention in the lectures but also focus their studying. They know exactly where to get the information, they know what’s coming and they don’t feel as though there’s some kind of trick information out there that they haven’t picked up on. So I found that that has been very helpful. The other key piece actually is that I’ve found that I can move faster. I don’t have to wait for students to copy down everything off the slide and I can actually get more done in the class time that I have.

Related to the grading methods, you know, again most of my experience as a student was midterm and final. And what I realized was that these students have multiple skills and multiple means of expressing them, so I tried to incorporate that, especially in an assessment course. Within the grading, they have multiple opportunities to show off their skills. For example they need to do two informal assessments. Well, one informal
assessment and one evaluation where they have an assessment instrument. And they also have to do a written report at the end of the semester. So that’s one component where the students have to express themselves in writing. There’s also a traditional exam format. But then the final exam is done as an oral presentation where they have a mock I.E.P. meeting and they have to present the results of that written report that they’ve done to the team. So students who are more comfortable in that kind of environment can show those talents. And then there’s also an extra credit option where they have to attend an I.E.P. at their school where they’re student teaching and do a written report of that. So there’s multiple means for them to show their talents and show their abilities.

In addition with the written format they’re always given very clear criteria on, for example, what I’m looking for in the paper, in an informal assessment specifically what types of information I need to see for particular levels of grades, that spelling counts, that grammar counts. That’s made very clear. And also with the case study they can pass in drafts. The course is set up so they can pass in drafts over the span of five weeks and get feedback from me, get feedback from their peers, improve their case study and continually resubmit it for almost a month and get feedback on it. They can also, after they’ve done the scoring of the assessments, return the protocols and I will give them feedback, that they’ve done the scoring properly and they don’t advance to a final report with glaring mistakes. So I’ve tried to build that kind of flexibility in to the structure of the course and also the grading of the course.