

Virginia Tech  
Spring 2019 VT Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT)

**Course:** ENGL\_5004\_19102\_201901: Theory & Practice in University Writing Instruction-ENGL\_5004\_19102\_201901

**Instructor:** Derek Mueller \*

**Response Rate:** 9/14 (64.29 %)

**1 - Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:**

**1A - The instructor was well prepared.**

Derek Mueller

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percent	Percent Responses	Means										
Strongly disagree	(1)	0	0.00%			4.89	5.47	5.46	Question	College	Department	Mean	STD	Median	
Disagree	(2)	0	0.00%												
Somewhat disagree	(3)	2	22.22%	█											
Somewhat agree	(4)	1	11.11%	█											
Agree	(5)	2	22.22%	█											
Strongly agree	(6)	4	44.44%	█											
					0	25	50	100	Question	College	Department	Mean	STD	Median	
Response Rate	Mean	STD	Median	College	Mean	STD	Median	Department	Mean	STD	Median				
9/14 (64.29%)	4.89	1.27	5.00	20853	5.47	0.88	6.00	Department	3952	5.46	0.92	6.00			

**1 - Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:**

**1B - The instructor presented the subject matter clearly.**

Derek Mueller

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percent	Percent Responses	Means										
Strongly disagree	(1)	0	0.00%			4.22	5.31	5.34	Question	College	Department	Mean	STD	Median	
Disagree	(2)	2	22.22%	█											
Somewhat disagree	(3)	1	11.11%	█											
Somewhat agree	(4)	2	22.22%	█											
Agree	(5)	1	11.11%	█											
Strongly agree	(6)	3	33.33%	█											
					0	25	50	100	Question	College	Department	Mean	STD	Median	
Response Rate	Mean	STD	Median	College	Mean	STD	Median	Department	Mean	STD	Median				
9/14 (64.29%)	4.22	1.64	4.00	20756	5.31	1.05	6.00	Department	3940	5.34	1.03	6.00			

**1 - Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:**

**1C - The instructor provided feedback intended to improve my course performance.**

Derek Mueller

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percent	Percent Responses	Means										
Strongly disagree	(1)	0	0.00%			4.78	5.27	5.40	Question	College	Department	Mean	STD	Median	
Disagree	(2)	1	11.11%	█											
Somewhat disagree	(3)	1	11.11%	█											
Somewhat agree	(4)	1	11.11%	█											
Agree	(5)	2	22.22%	█											
Strongly agree	(6)	4	44.44%	█											
					0	25	50	100	Question	College	Department	Mean	STD	Median	
Response Rate	Mean	STD	Median	College	Mean	STD	Median	Department	Mean	STD	Median				
9/14 (64.29%)	4.78	1.48	5.00	20790	5.27	1.12	6.00	Department	3945	5.40	1.03	6.00			

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**Instructor:** Derek Mueller \*  
**Response Rate:** 9/14 (64.29 %)

**1 - Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:**

**1D - The instructor fostered an atmosphere of mutual respect.**

Derek Mueller

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percent	Percent Responses	Means								
Strongly disagree	(1)	2	22.22%										
Disagree	(2)	2	22.22%										
Somewhat disagree	(3)	1	11.11%										
Somewhat agree	(4)	0	0.00%										
Agree	(5)	1	11.11%										
Strongly agree	(6)	3	33.33%										
					0	25	50	100	Question	College	Department		
<b>Response Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>College</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>		
9/14 (64.29%)	3.56	2.19	3.00	20747	5.53	0.89	6.00	3938	5.53	0.92	6.00		

**1 - Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:**

**1E - Overall, the instructor's teaching was effective.**

Derek Mueller

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percent	Percent Responses	Means								
Strongly disagree	(1)	2	22.22%										
Disagree	(2)	0	0.00%										
Somewhat disagree	(3)	3	33.33%										
Somewhat agree	(4)	0	0.00%										
Agree	(5)	1	11.11%										
Strongly agree	(6)	3	33.33%										
					0	25	50	100	Question	College	Department		
<b>Response Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>College</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>		
9/14 (64.29%)	3.78	2.05	3.00	20628	5.30	1.08	6.00	3921	5.33	1.08	6.00		

**2 - 2A - What did the instructor do that most helped in your learning?**

Derek Mueller

Response Rate	Mean
8/14 (57.14%)	

- Excellent in-class activities, relevant readings, fun and helpful assignments, and Dr. Mueller was very helpful in class and outside of class in office hours.
- Assign readings I can revisit, and I think the model of future teachers doing their own assignments is pretty effective. I learned what to assign and how to evaluate based on those projects
- In teaching the way he did, Dr. Mueller provided a good model for what not to do in the classroom. Unfortunately, he hijacked many of the class discussions, either by inserting his own questions above those submitted by the students, or talking about his stance on the discussed issues at length, leaving little window for our input. During class discussions as well as written feedback and individual conferences, students from different backgrounds received disproportionately unequal treatment, revealing a certain amount of bias. For example, certain students would be shut down in class while others would be asked what they thought on the matter without prompting. Alarmingly, Dr. Mueller chose to assign texts he admitted to be controversial (for example, one contained multiple uses of racial and gener-specific slurs), yet never explicitly condemned such practices and chose to defend the authors' contributions to the field instead. In both class discussion and written work, students were penalized for strongly critiquing either texts or their authors, with the rationale being either the students' unwillingness to "play the believing game", or the positive aspects of the author's moral character whom Dr. Mueller can vouch for personally. The reading list consisted of several works overviewing the development of college composition as a field, but contained very few landmark texts that were outsourced to the students' self-education. Although there was an impressive amount of written feedback provided for every major assignment that invited further discussion, the overall level of communication between the instructor and the class was poor, as the students were frequently invited to "challenge" the instructor on points of contention. Additionally, the entire course was, in an implicitly threatening manner, framed as a "15-week long job interview" that would determined who would be "worthy" of taking on teaching responsibilities in the Fall.
- Dr. Mueller was able to supply us with many useful resources to read outside of class because he is aware of the history of composition and the prominent figures within the field.
- Open my eyes to new things happening in Composition and Rhetoric.
- Derek provided a wide range of readings and projects for us to complete. Doing the projects that were to be assigned in 1105 helped us see what was expected.
- Dr. Mueller provided readings and resources that were useful to my understanding of composition theory and composition in the university. The commonplace book assignment was very helpful. Also the multiple explorations of note-taking in the short form set were useful exercises. The agendas were helpful in guiding classes. Also, the use of group discussion questions allowed students to voice concerns/questions about things that were important to them.
- The instructor included detailed notes on what would go on in class and chose readings that were helpful for understanding composition instruction.

# Virginia Tech

## Spring 2019 VT Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT)

**Course:** ENGL\_5004\_19102\_201901: Theory & Practice in University Writing Instruction-ENGL\_5004\_19102\_201901  
**Instructor:** Derek Mueller \*  
**Response Rate:** 9/14 (64.29 %)

3 - Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:													
3A - I have a deeper understanding of the subject matter as a result of this course.													
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percent	Percent Responses	Means								
Strongly disagree	(1)	1	11.11%										
Disagree	(2)	0	0.00%										
Somewhat disagree	(3)	1	11.11%										
Somewhat agree	(4)	2	22.22%										
Agree	(5)	2	22.22%										
Strongly agree	(6)	3	33.33%										
					0	25	50	100	Question	College	Department		
<b>Response Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>College</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>		
9/14 (64.29%)	4.44	1.67	5.00	19371	5.29	1.02	6.00	3779	5.20	1.07	5.00		

3 - Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:													
3B - My interest in the subject matter was stimulated by this course.													
Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percent	Percent Responses	Means								
Strongly disagree	(1)	1	11.11%										
Disagree	(2)	0	0.00%										
Somewhat disagree	(3)	1	11.11%										
Somewhat agree	(4)	1	11.11%										
Agree	(5)	2	22.22%										
Strongly agree	(6)	4	44.44%										
					0	25	50	100	Question	College	Department		
<b>Response Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>College</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>		
9/14 (64.29%)	4.67	1.73	5.00	19293	5.04	1.26	5.00	3768	4.85	1.36	5.00		

4 - 4A - What could you have done to be a better learner?	
<b>Response Rate</b>	7/14 (50%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I think I could have better paced some of my work for longer projects.</li> <li>This class sent me to therapy.</li> <li>Self-sponsored reading was a major recurring theme throughout the course. I admit I have done the bare minimum required while I could do more work here. However, some of the reading/self-educating I did do on top of what was required could not be reflected through the assignments given to us (i.e. the commonplace book had to be focused in the way that discouraged reading "too broadly"). I was also unable to treat most of the major assignments with the presumed level of seriousness, since they were designed for freshmen students, and asking graduate students to complete them - and later giving numerical grades on those assignments - felt borderline insulting.</li> <li>I could have spoken more in class and participated more frequently in group discussions.</li> <li>While I'm not sure I agree that this question should appear on SPOT evaluations, I will answer it. I could have taken more of a leadership role in class and done more outside reading on the subject.</li> <li>I could have been less distracted in one class period. I also could have spoken to Dr. Mueller directly, sooner about my concerns in the class.</li> <li>I could have spread out my work on the major assignments over a longer period of time.</li> </ul>	

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**Instructor:** Derek Mueller \*

**Response Rate:** 9/14 (64.29 %)

**5 - 5A - Please add any additional comments regarding the course and/or instructor here:**

**Derek Mueller**

**Response Rate** 7/14 (50%)

- Dr. Mueller fostered a mixed environment. By mid semester, I felt like I was on the wrong side of an imaginary wall of academic approval, and I felt that was not initiated by my performance in the class. Tension between MFA and MA students crept in where there was none before, and I felt that was due to a misconception about the MFAs and their fitness to teach something more traditional to rhet students. Had a hard time accepting this.
- Given the amount of bias displayed by the instructor, particularly towards students of color, female students, and students with non-normative gender expression, as well as Dr. Mueller's ignorance of said bias and corresponding power inequality even after it has been pointed out to him directly, I feel concerned for the students taking the same course in the future, their emotional as well as professional well-being. I suspect my own mental health and academic performance have been compromised significantly throughout the semester as the result of this course. Let me note that the instructor's behavior was noticeably different on the days the class was observed by another faculty member, showing he can be gracious with the invited undergraduate students and respectful towards fellow teachers, which unfortunately does not translate to interactions with graduate students. Of course, my desire to teach composition has diminished greatly as a result, although I still feel competent and motivated enough to undertake it, with the hope that a different faculty member would act as my advisor.
- At first, Dr. Mueller claimed he was interested in dealing with his students as peers and colleagues rather than interacting with us in the terms of academic (and for that matter, social/political) hierarchy. I appreciated his comments on honoring our voices and our diversity, and I enjoyed the class in the beginning. However, the class quickly shifted, as he took an antagonistic position against certain members of the class who tended to disagree with him, which created tension and contradicted his previous statements. It was as if he took students' behaviors or pedagogical concerns personally rather than professionally. He also used the language of "challenge" rather than "disagree" when inviting students to offer opposing ideas, which seemed alienating as it implies conflict and argument rather than collaboration toward a common goal.
- Derek provided us with tools to help us devise our curriculum and prepare us for teaching. He accomplished this in a hostile environment.
- While I understand Dr. Mueller is new to Virginia Tech, at times he seemed to be attempting to establish his credibility or authority too strongly, especially considering this is a graduate-level course. For instance, he held individual interrogation-style meetings with every student when he discovered some students were participating in a course-related backchannel. Additionally, he often grew defensive when students posed questions in class, saying that there was a reason for things to be the way they were without articulating what that reason was; he sometimes shut down critical questions students asked, even though coursework is the place to be asking such questions. Also, Dr. Mueller has a tendency to speak in an extremely high register, loaded with discipline-specific jargon that serves to alienate students. Overall, I would like Dr. Mueller to be more intentional about articulating the purposes behind assignments. His assignment prompts are also confusingly wordy. Simplification would benefit students and would also model concise writing. A stronger concern, however, is the ways in which Dr. Mueller's implicit biases seemed to impact our class: authors of color were underrepresented, texts that subtly promoted misogyny were assigned, and students who were women of color seemed to be targeted whereas male students of all races were provided with leeway. Regardless of whether or not these examples were intended as offensive or biased does not matter; we know today that what matters in such circumstances is impact, not intent. I know many female students felt negatively impacted by these situations, even though I am sure that was not Dr. Mueller's intent. Besides these egregious ethical problems, Dr. Mueller was generally not as lenient with students as I would expect. When asked for extensions or opportunities to redo assignments, he refused. I am sure this is not intended as a model for how he expects his GTAs to treat First-Year Writing students. I would like Dr. Mueller to investigate taking more equity trainings and completing personal reading on privilege. He holds a powerful role at the university which is amplified by his identity as a white, cisgender male. I will say Dr. Mueller has demonstrated a willingness to learn and change; I expect him to continue this work with humility. In terms of the course, I think this would be a great opportunity for coteaching. Is there an instructor in the Higher Ed department that could teach this in collaboration with the English department? Overall, the knowledge of composition and rhetoric seemed relatively strong (even if it was not presented in plain language) but the knowledge of teaching and education was not there. By underemphasizing the role of teaching in a course intended to prepare GTAs to teach, the university is propagating the stereotype that R1s don't care about the quality of instruction. I left this course knowing something of composition as a field, but still feeling confused. I felt that Dr. Mueller and the class frequently talked around topics without ever directly addressing them. I would have liked to see more frequent moments of "stepping back" from the course material to contextualize it within the framework of our GTAs and our different career trajectories.
- Dr. Mueller had intersectional intentions for this course, but I don't think they played out. I hoped for clearer instructions for all assignments, and was often concerned that my hard work was not going to meet his standards. I understand I could have spoken to Dr. Mueller in person about this, but did not feel comfortable doing that. I think it is part of an instructor's job to make assignment sheets that are clear and easy to follow. I understand that Dr. Mueller was working in a time of transition that made it hard for him to give us specifics about our roles, but that was difficult. I wanted clearer answers to lots of questions that I didn't get. I also think Dr. Mueller had good intentions, but the impact of his teaching often was negative, and his reactions to class concerns were defensive rather than reconciling or responsive. I understand that he is a newcomer at VT, so were many of his students. The course was often haunted by uncertainty (in what to do in assignments, in how to answer questions, in what our roles as instructors next year would be, etc.) I think the course could use some restructuring for clarity.
- Thank you for all your help!

**6 - 6A - How would you rate the physical environment in which you took this class based upon your ability to see, hear, concentrate, and participate?**

Response Option	Weight	Frequency	Percent	Percent Responses	Means						
Very Bad	(1)	0	0.00%			4.44	5.20	5.22			
Bad	(2)	1	11.11%	█							
Poor	(3)	0	0.00%								
Fair	(4)	3	33.33%	███							
Good	(5)	4	44.44%	█████							
Very Good	(6)	1	11.11%	█							
					0	25	50	100	Question	College	Department
<b>Response Rate</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>College</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>STD</b>	<b>Median</b>
9/14 (64.29%)	4.44	1.13	5.00	19233	5.20	0.96	5.00	3760	5.22	0.96	5.00

**7 - 7A - Please add any comments about the physical environment here:**

**Response Rate** 4/14 (28.57%)

- This is a terrible classroom physical classroom space that makes it difficult to see.
- Room is fine. Sometimes too warm and it needs more outlets.
- While I have several classes that take place in the same room, it was overcrowded for the number of people enrolled in this section. Moreover, the 5:30 to 8:15 p.m. time slot is extra strenuous.
- The room's design forces at least one person to have their back to the main presentation screen. If there were multiple screens, this problem would be alleviated. In addition, the single screen had many glitches and didn't work reliably, and the lights turned off automatically once or twice.