

January 10, 2009

To: Dean Stipek

From: Michele Kerr, STEP Teacher Candidate

RE: Academic Grievance

Dean Stipek,

Attached is a grievance regarding my grade, supervisory assessment, and inconsistencies involving my treatment for the Fall practicum course

While a B might not seem particularly detrimental to any one student, Dr. Lotan has separately informed me that she has concerns that I am “unsuited for the practice of teaching” and has begun to initiate the Guidelines for Review of that. She did not mention my practicum grade as part of these concerns, but she has made it clear that she intends to continue pursuing her concerns. If my B grade is substantially lower than most or all of my classmates, then Dr. Lotan can at some point use this grade as further evidence as to my unsuitability for the practice of teaching. Indeed, one might reasonably wonder if that knowledge factored into her assessment.

[Supervisor] will be my supervisor for the rest of my time at STEP, despite evincing strong distaste for me personally and having expressed doubts about my honesty. He gave me a low rating with no warning and a complete lack of consistency with other supervisors at STEP. No one at STEP has expressed any concern at this lack of warning. I have every reason to think this can happen again.

Both Dr. Lotan and [Supervisor] exert enormous power over my ability to become a teacher. Thus, I can go into tremendous debt to pay Stanford’s fees, give up the income of working for a year, succeed academically and at my student teaching assignment--and yet still be denied a teaching credential based solely on their say-so. Their failure to communicate any dissatisfaction until the moment that they give me low assessments is, consequently, deeply troubling, as is their apparent disdain for any consistent standard. For this reason, I hope this grievance will be reviewed not solely for its impact on the fall academic quarter, but for its ramifications to my future during the next two quarters at STEP.

I have filed a non-academic grievance against Dr. Lotan and Dean Callan for harassment and am including a copy for your information.

Sincerely,

Michele Kerr

Academic Grievance

Class

Education 246B, Secondary Teaching Practicum, Fall Quarter

Causes of Grievance

1. I received a B in the Practicum course.
2. I received very low ratings--“no evidence”--on one category of my supervisory assessment.
3. My supervisor, the program director, and the director of Clinical Work are

Timing

I have been unhappy about my assessment since December 3rd

- observations and confirming other impressions as well
19. [DCP]'s email with undocumented observation requirements
 20. [STEP Staffer]'s email with different standard for other students
 21. Observation Cycle document
 22. JMK's email asking for help on reflection #1
 23. JMK's original reflection #2
 24. [Supervisor]'s rejection of reflection #2
 25. JMK's email asking for help (and expressing frustration) on reflection #2

Grievance #1: B Grade in Practicum

Instructors in STEP courses often, but not always, contact students if they are “at risk” of getting a B. I am concerned that (1) the B grade is substantially lower than that given to other students in the class and (2) this relative assessment is unwarranted based on my performance and course criteria. In any event, Dr. Lotan apparently did not calculate the grade according to the published course criteria.

While I have not been told this officially, I am expected to understand that my lower grade is due to my supervisor [Supervisor]’s extraordinarily low ranking of my professionalism in his quarterly assessment.

Practicum Course Grading Criteria

On December 3, Dr. Lotan told the practicum class that she would weight the professionalism strand the most heavily of all six criteria used on our student teaching assessments. When [Cooperating Teacher], my cooperating teacher, asked about this, she wrote him: “As I have done for the past nine years, at the end of every quarter, I remind the candidates of the importance of documented growth on standards 1-5. Every year and every quarter, I emphasize the importance of standard 6 and my careful read of the assessment provided by the supervisors and cooperating teachers.”² Dr. Lotan, therefore, has for nine years used very different criteria from the published course description³, which does not indicate that standard 6, professionalism, is given extra weight.

What the course description does describe is as follows: 100 points are given for student teaching and supervisory. The student teaching/supervisory documents used for the grade are:

- Supervisor assessment, consisting of six standards and various sub-categories⁴
- Cooperating teacher assessment⁵
- All documents associated with each observati

Grievance #2: Supervisor Assessment

My supervisor, [Supervisor], has given me no written reason for his low professionalism assessment. He originally gave me straight “no evidence” in all boxes, although he then upgraded two of the categories to “novice” standard. While I will focus on the professionalism component because it was substantially out of synch with reality, [Supervisor] also gave me “no evidence” or “little evidence” ratings in other standards when he had in fact seen substantial evidence.

Assessment Ratings

I realize that supervisor assessments are extremely inconsistent within STEP; however, I believe that my ratings have been used to give me a low grade in practicum. Consequently, I feel that evidence of my engagement with the assessment standards warrants comparison with other students to ensure a consistent rating criteria.⁸

Standard One: Supports and Engages Students in Learning

1.1 “builds on students’ prior knowledge, life experience, and interests to achieving learning goals”

Rating: “No evidence”

Standard Three: Understanding and Organization of Subject Matter

3.4: “Uses knowledge of student development, subject matter, instructional resources, and teaching strategies to make subject matter accessible for all students.”

Rating: No evidence

Evidence: [Supervisor] references in other areas an “excellent” exponential assessment I created, but apparently doesn’t see this as applicable to this category. I submit that my knowledge of exponent properties, the students’ abilities and common misconceptions, and an innovative teaching strategy to help students gain a better understanding of exponential properties.

Standard Five: Assessing Student Learning

5.1: “establishes and clearly communicates learning goals for all students.”

Rating: Novice

Evidence:

[Supervisor] has both seen me engage my “missing homework” ritual and heard me discuss it in supervisory. I regularly print out students’ missing homework and remind them of the impact it has on their grade. This is a ritual of

Rating: Original “No Evidence”, upgraded to “Novice”.

Evidence:

I am passionate about discussing teaching issues and talking about my teaching challenges. Our supervisory was, until the troubles began, a non-stop discourse in teaching and reflection on teaching. I used to love supervisory precisely because we talked about the practice of teaching—mine, [supervisory partner]’s, and teaching in general. Apparently, [Supervisor] does not consider my form of discussion to be reflection. He did not tell me this. Nor did he tell me that he would only consider written reflections (more on this later) evidence of reflection. [Supervisor] knows very well that I selected my secondary class, Algebra Support, for reasons of professional development. I want to work with students who struggle with math and who have difficulty succeeding in school. I am known for this. He knows I originally wanted it to be my primary class, a request he concurred with, until we were told that the primary class must be a credit course (Algebra Support is an elective). [Supervisor] also knows that I have not only passed all three Math Single Subject CSETs, but also those in Social Science and that I intended to finish up the English Single Subject CSETs in January (I took the test on January 10th and expect to pass, as I majored in English and it’s my strongest subject). [Supervisor] knows, because I told him in early October, that my goal is to teach in all three subjects, focusing primarily on students struggling in math and composition, with my dream history class being AP US History.

I believe I am the only STEP candidate who has multiple single subject CSETs passed (although I know one math candidate tentatively planning on taking the Physics test). I did this all on my own, something else [Supervisor] knows. I do not understand why this would not be considered evidence that I am actively engaged in creating a professional development plan.

6.2: “establishes professional learning goals, pursues opportunities to develop professional knowledge and skill, and participates in the extended professional community”

Rating: No Evidence

Evidence:

[Supervisor] knows, because I mentioned it in supervisory, that I took on the challenge of reviewing two math books for my C&I instructor, [name omitted], despite an extraordinarily heavy workload during the summer quarter. I was paid an honorarium, but I did it for the chance to get the experience of reviewing textbooks, and said so to [instructor] at the time.

As a private instructor and tutor with five years experience, I have a wide network

in the community. I am a key resource at College Track, an East Palo Alto tutoring organization that I work with both as a Kaplan instructor and as a volunteer, and maintain a website of student test scores and their improvement to demonstrate the value of test prep for low income and minority students.

If STEP allows me to finish the program, it will be my second Master's degree. I came back to school because as much as I love tutoring and private instruction, I wanted to develop professionally as a public school teacher. [Supervisor] may not like my method of doing so, but he is well aware of the fact that I'm a lifelong learner and that I am here because I wanted to become a teacher.

6.3: "Learns about and works with local communities to improve professional practice".

Rating: Originally "No Evidence", upgraded to "Novice"

Evidence:

[Supervisor] upgraded me because of my College Track work (which he knew about already but didn't mention until I reminded him).

I am an employee of two major private instruction companies (Kaplan and Elite Education), and have considerable ties to the larger teaching community. I occasionally talk about my work at Kaplan and how I use that work to make tests and college admissions more real for my students.

6.7: “Uses and accepts constructive criticism”

Rating: No Evidence

I believe that this rating is a key reason for [Supervisor]’s dissatisfaction with me. He told me in our 11/19 meeting (more on that later) that I reject all criticism and argue with him about everything. Had he made his feelings clear earlier, I would have modified my manner of discourse to make him feel more comfortable.

However, as I tried to tell him, I have a number of very clear teaching philosophies. I love debating approaches and priorities, and thought that’s what we were doing—as did [supervisory partner], my supervisory partner. Thus, when [Supervisor] told me to talk more slowly, I nodded and said “Yes, I always need to remember that, thanks”—which would seem to me to be accepting constructive criticism. But when [Supervisor] told me to never, EVER tell a student that he or she has given an incorrect answer, I replied that I completely disagree with that approach. I believe it’s perfectly appropriate to say casually, without emphasis, that the student has given the wrong answer. That doesn’t mean I do it all the time, and it doesn’t mean that I don’t welcome his advice. It just means that to me, the far more interesting discussion is the issue of why so many teachers always tell their students that mistakes are okay but never want to actually tell them that they’ve made a mistake. I’ve been teaching classes in test prep, composition, and US History for five years, and this is something I have thought about a lot.

[Supervisor] has told me that he sees such responses as “defensiveness”. Nothing could be further from the truth. However, had he told me this sooner, I would have understood that he was unhappy and changed my approach.

I am not arguing with this rating, since it accurately reflects [Supervisor]’s belief. However, his inability to address this with me for the first 10 weeks of practicum and then angrily speak loudly to me about it in the middle of November has been a source of distress and sadness for me.

Grievance #3: Inconsistent Standards

On 11/19/08, without any prior warning or hint of dissatisfaction, [Supervisor] summarily switched my secondary class to a different class, with the stated objective of forcing me to do more observations. He never consulted me on this, although he met secretly with my cooperating teacher to tell him of his intentions.

Undocumented Observation Requirement

Dean Callan⁹ told me in our 12/3 meeting that [Supervisor]'s primary reason for switching out my classes was to encourage me to spend more time teaching in a large classroom, rather than working with small groups. This may be something that was added after the fact, but it's absolutely untrue that [Supervisor] told me this. He clearly presented the move as corrective, although I was unclear as to what specific behavior was being corrected. My supervisory partner, [supervisory partner], confirmed my understanding in email¹⁰ that he never mentioned any objective other than to give me time for forced observations. Moreover, such a switch wasn't needed. I already worked three classes, including the Algebra II/Trig class that became my secondary. I might have mildly objected if [Supervisor] had just told me he wanted to formally switch my secondary classes to reflect his priority for my teaching large groups, but [Supervisor] quite clearly wanted me to stop working the Algebra Support class and go on mandated observations. He has also articulated this requirement to [Cooperating Teacher] in email. I ask that [Supervisor]'s emails to [Cooperating Teacher] be requested and included as part of this grievance.

[Supervisor] insists that I have refused to do observations of other teachers, when in fact I have done all the observations required on the Integration Plan. I believe my supervisory

member, sent out a note¹² to the entire math cohort with “suggestions” for observations, and no required amount.

At no point did [Supervisor] or [DCP] inform me of any reason why they singled me out for mandating observations. They have provided me with any developmental reason why I should be forced to observe by their mandated schedule.

I have concluded that both of them are actually displeased because I made the mistake of saying that I would rather teach three classes than keep three hours permanently open for doing the occasional observation (and doing hom

didn't answer. At that time, I was worki

his verbal rejection, I was still confused, but submitted a reflection on 10/30 that was accepted.

- For 10/4 observation: None submitted, as [Supervisor] did not provide a debrief and never requested a reflection, even though this was his first observation of my primary class.
- For 10/21 observation: I wrote an observation on 11/5, but didn't realize I hadn't sent it to him until 11/15, when I immediately emailed it. [Supervisor] not only rejected this reflection, but seemed very angry about it. He felt I was "telling him he was wrong", which I certainly had no intention of doing. I wrote him back saying again that I was deeply puzzled by the reflection requirement, that I absolutely meant no offense, and that I would try again. I resubmitted a reflection on 12/2, for reasons described earlier.
- For 11/4 videotaped observation: I was unaware I needed to write a reflection until 11/17, and two days later [Supervisor]'s angry behavior with me, coupled with two huge assignments due on 11/21 and 12/1, drove it from my mind. I submitted it in early December.

In short, [Supervisor] never followed the procedure that was supposedly required (and is mentioned in the practicum course description). He never gave [supervisory partner] or me formal procedures to follow. At times, he violated the procedures (for example, not writing debriefs after observations).

I would never object to any of this except suddenly, on November 19th, [Supervisor] pretended that he had been using a formal observation procedure all along, and that I hadn't been following it.

Again, what I am most troubled by is [Supervisor] and [DCP]'s apparent ignorance of STEP's own procedures and requirements. Had I been given the Observation Cycle document, I could have read its clear instructions on how to write a reflection and been able to complete the requirement in a timely manner.

I asked my STEP students (in the same email mentioned above) how many of them were turning in their reflections within 48 hours. Over half the respondents said they had not. Two said that their supervisors expressly told them that their school work was more important. Others hadn't even done formal reflections in a few cases.

Supervisor Dissatisfaction

[Supervisor] underwent a dramatic change in behavior towards me during the week of 11/19 and beyond, and I am at a loss to explain it. In that meeting, after he dismissed [supervisory partner], he told me that I was impossible to work with, that he was "at a loss" for ways to instruct me. He said that I made supervisory an unpleasant experience and that I was constantly arguing with him. I was devastated. I had liked and respected [Supervisor], valuing his good opinion.

In my assessment review of 12/3, [Supervisor] actually became angry when I told him

that I had done several observations in the two weeks between 11/19 and that evening.

Standards for Review and Procedural Matters

Were the proper facts and criteria brought to bear on the decision?

Dr. Lotan did not use the facts defined in her own course description to calculate my grade. Despite my getting one of the lowest grades possible in the class, she never gave me any warning or sign that I was not meeting the course components.

[Supervisor] did not use the same facts and criteria that other supervisors used and that were defined in STEP documents to assess my professionalism. He expressly ignored other facts that should have raised my rating.

[Supervisor] and [DCP] both said they were completely unaware of the Integration Plan, a required element of the contract we sign with our placement schools. Certainly [Supervisor] did not use the fact that I had met all the elements of my Integration Plan in my assessment.

[Supervisor] was either unaware of or ignored the STEP Observation Cycle and the defined procedure for observations and certainly did not use them. Had he followed a defined procedure, I would have been less confused about the requirements.

Were improper or extraneous facts or criteria brought to bear that substantially affected the decision to the detriment of the grievant?

I believe Dr. Lotan, [DCP], and [Supervisor] have allowed their personal distaste for my teaching philosophy and my style of discourse to give me a lower grade than I deserved. Certainly, [Supervisor] used improper criteria to give me a lower assessment, based on STEP documents, and he did so inconsistently not only with other supervisors, but with his assessment of [supervisory partner], who did not receive a low assessment.

Were there any procedural irregularities that substantially affected the outcome of the matter to the detriment of the grievant?

At no time prior to the middle of November did [Supervisor] give me any warning that he was dissatisfied with my work. He has acknowledged this, but didn't think it necessary.

Given [Supervisor]'s very strong opinions of my low professionalism, as expressed both to me and in email to my cooperating teacher, his failure to notify me earlier was a major procedural irregularity that substantially affected the outcome of this matter, to my detriment.

Had [Supervisor] told me that he wanted me to do the observations in the Integration plan, I would have done them. Had [Supervisor] told me he wanted reflections in 48 hours after observation, I would have done them. Instead, he ran supervisory as if it was just an engaging chat session with paperwork that needed to be done eventually--until

