

March 5, 2002

To: Linda S. Sparke, Chair
Department of Astronomy
5534 Sterling Hall

From: Jordan D. Marché II, Lecturer

Re: Observations of Søren Meibom in ASTR 100

I observed a discussion section taught by Søren Meibom at 1:20 p.m. on Thursday, February 28. Søren was well-prepared and greeted students with typical enthusiasm and a sense of humor.

The first part of the period was taken up with his return of exams to students and answering their questions about them. Søren's explanations were clearly presented and made good use of the blackboard to illustrate concepts such as Kepler's Laws and Wien's Law, stressing how the latter would be employed again in the course. He also explained the differences between horizon and astronomical coordinate systems. These exchanges were open and friendly; Søren displayed a genuine concern that students understood the materials.

The remainder of the period was devoted to concepts and questions relating to the week's lecture topics and current homework assignment. Søren presented some fine analogies (e.g., billiard ball collisions) to explain accretionary heating during planetary formation, and the operation of convection currents inside Earth. At no time did he provide students with direct answers to homework questions. Although this approach confirms Søren's knowledge and abilities to explain abstract scientific concepts, most students remained largely passive during this explanatory phase. A further emphasis on Socratic-style questioning is needed, in order to further draw out the students and to raise their level of participation (thereby avoiding the TA's tendency to give mini-lectures). I have shared with Søren some possible means for accomplishing this goal, such as the technique of having students bring at least one question with them to each discussion period.

I also observed Søren on February 6 as he gave the first of three planetarium demonstrations pertaining to concepts of the celestial sphere. After observing one or two of my own presentations, he trained himself to become familiar with the Spitz star instrument. His presentation was very professional; he not only manipulated the projector well but kept the attention of his audience throughout and achieved all of the intended objectives. He displays a confident, yet relaxed manner of speaking and is perfectly fluent in English. Søren relates well to students and injects an appropriate amount of humor into his talks that make them enjoyable as well as educational.

Søren displays a high level of initiative and commitment as a TA; his teaching is satisfactory and effective, with some room for improvement in certain areas. He is making a valuable contribution to the mission of the astronomy department.