

22 March 2010

Kevin Cassell
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Dear Kevin:

Thank you for the opportunity to observe you teaching HU 3120: Technical and Scientific Communication on Friday February 12, 2010 and on Monday February 14, 2010. On the days we visited, you collected papers, returned papers, and analyzed with the students their answers to two assignments.

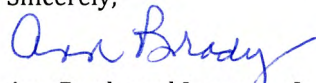
You began both class periods by asking students for their feedback on the assignment they had just completed. During this discussion, you encouraged students to express their opinions while inviting them to complicate and to reflect on the larger goals of the assignment. This specific assignment required students to compose a memo to solve an ethical dilemma in the workplace. In this scenario, the students assumed the role of the boss writing to their employees. Student interest and participation in this preliminary discussion was high, and their involvement was evident. Your ability to encourage students to share their experiences with the assignment definitely contributed to fostering an environment in which students were compelled to connect the activity of the day to the larger goals of the class while also empowering them as active members of a learning community.

The second order of business during class was for you to collect the memos the students had composed as answers to the assignment. You then showed with the document camera some randomly selected answers to the entire class; naturally, you ensured that no information identifying the writer was visible. You initiated the discussion by asking students what their first reactions to the presented memo were, given the content and purpose of the document. This allowed for some general remarks regarding the format and the global effectiveness of the memo. After listening to their initial responses, you worked very quickly to lead students to complicate and refine their arguments. To this end, you guided the discussions by asking specific questions and hereby, by directly encouraging students to support their stances. Specifically, your questions required students to carefully assess the rhetorical situation of the document and to connect the composing choices with the audience, purpose, and the role of the writer. Rhetoric was in this respect largely invoked in the discussion. You were also very careful to always connect the terms and concepts used by yourself or the students with the textbook reading assignments. We couldn't help but notice that during the discussions, students started spontaneously to answer to each other. Your role as a catalyst of a debate with such high student involvement offered a perfect illustration of your own comfort with a de-centered pedagogy as well as the thought-provoking dimension of your assignments. Even when you had to sometime redirect the conversations, it was accomplished entirely without coercion and always in respect of students' point of view.

Ultimately, what we saw during these two class periods was not the proverbial "sage on the stage," but rather a persuasive and effective "guide on the side." Your comfort and confidence were apparent through the entire class. Your easy rapport with your students and your de-centered approach to the classroom suited you well, and were instrumental to the teaching effectiveness we observed.

If you have any questions about our observations or if you want to discuss any aspects of your teaching, please let us know. And again, thank you for making us feel welcome in your class

Sincerely,



Ann Brady and Laurence José.

