



SUNY College of Technology

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To Whom It May Concern:

Last night I was treated to a lecture that Kevin Cassell presented to the Dansville Women's Civic Club on the film techniques of framing, light and dark contrasts, camera angles, and juxtaposition of contrasting scenes. We watched clips from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *Schindler's List*, *Mad King George*, and *Cabaret*. Though I had previously seen most of those movies, Kevin made me aware of how little I had noticed in previously appreciating them. The light and darkness surrounding *Schindler* as he decides that he will help, the camera angles as we see both the murders and rescue of one couple from the concentration camp, the camera angles as the couple is brought to *Schindler's* factory, and the Spielberg angle from a car parked next to the daughter who helped arrange her parents' rescue are only now seen and understood. Kevin gives that to his learners. After his presentation, the members of the Civic Club sat there and discussed what we had learned and what a fine teacher he is—several women mentioned that they would love to take his course. I was proud to claim him as my colleague.

And I was delighted to be able to tell about the lectures I had previously heard Kevin give when I observed his film class. Although the class was in Brown 119, Kevin is miraculously able to keep the discussion intimate. Since the class is regularly focused on carefully chosen film clips, the students are ready to discuss whatever techniques are being illustrated. Since most of the students come from the graphic arts curriculum, they are more knowledgeable about the craft they are observing. Kevin begins class with an outline of what the class will cover, connecting it to their reading the night before in their texts, promising specific examples in the film clips to follow. This allows the students to get their thoughts and their notebooks in order to maximize the learning that will occur.

We learned about form versus content, the use of black and white to convey content, the use of split screen, undercutting versus crosscutting, interrupting, let motif, video angles, over the shoulder shots, and each was made clear by examples from film clips. One particularly memorable scene was from *Lawrence of Arabia* where the blowing out of Peter O'Toole's match blends into the sun in the next scene. As Kevin says, "You will never quite watch the movie the same way again." Often when he played a film clip, he asked the students what they noticed and was able to get them to see and appreciate in new ways how the films were made from such historic works like *The Runaway Horse*, *The Execution of Mary Stuart*, *Reefer Madness* to *Birdcage* and a film by Quentin Tarentino. He also lectured on the history of film making, so we saw and learned about Thomas Edison, the kinetograph, Fred Ott's *The Sneeze*, a film that was simply the arrival of a train, and an apparently scandalous piece called *The Kiss*. The fun of watching these examples and the student and instructor comments that followed made for an enjoyable learning experience and two full pages of notes. And I don't even have to take an exam on it; Kevin makes his listeners want to know.

The accompanying teaching materials that Kevin sent me for the class are equally impressive. Thoughtful and detailed, they make it so students know exactly what is expected of them on written assignments, are provided with rubrics that define what will be graded and how it will be weighted, and are provided with examples of good answers to the assignments. What

a wonderful way to insure the quality of work to be done. Clearly the assignments are crafted to apply the techniques and principles taught in class and in the text, but students are actually asked to discuss filming, for example, of a briefly outlined scene of power, describing camera angles, sounds, and dialogue. Then students are presented with two iterations of the assignment. In another assignment, Kevin even provided them with what the five required postings on Blackboard discussions should contain and then gave examples of insightful comments. Kevin sets the students up so that they will know exactly what is expected of them to be successful in the class.

A letter about Kevin needs to also include at least a bit about what a wonderful colleague he is outside of the classroom. When the Strategic Planning Committee sent out the results of its survey, it was Kevin's response that helped in the revision of our initial proposals. I just finished serving on a subcommittee of the Strategic Planning Committee for Academic Programs, which Kevin co-chaired with Mike Ronan. Kevin, along with Danyelle Moore from Online Learning, did the section of our report on the quality, future and goals for our online programs. It was the only report that needed almost no editing or discussion, and when it went to the larger committee with Greg Sammons and Alex Bitterman, it again needed almost no change (many of the committee proposals had major edits). Kevin has also served on the Faculty Senate's Committee on Promotion and Tenure and is helping revise our campus procedures; they will be clearer and better because of him. And just yesterday at our department meeting, Kevin was encouraging colleagues to come to the student presentations in the SLC and help in the judging. He has volunteered to organize next year's student showcases and is hoping to involve outside industries to provide judges and prizes for our students. In this, and in his enthusiastic, creative, and constructive embracing of Alfred State's educational mission, Kevin is an inspiration and example to all of us.

Sincerely,



Dr. Aniko V. Constantine
Distinguished Teaching Professor

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