

Memorandum

To: Dean Ramser
From: Yolanda
Date: 2/22/2013
Re: CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

Attached to this memo is a copy of the classroom observation by Lauri Ramey. If you wish to submit a rebuttal statement, you must do so no later than March 7, 2013.

Attachment

Peer Observation for Dean Ramser, 2012-13

On November 19, 2012, I observed Dean Ramser's ENGL 095 class which met in KH B3013 from 10:30-11:30 in Fall quarter.

Prior to my observation, Mr. Ramser provided me with the syllabus and a wealth of course materials that had been distributed to the students. These materials included an outstanding Peer Review Sheet that he had devised for students to respond to their classmates' essays; a well-detailed Paragraphs and Topic Sentences handout; a copy of the Department's English 095 Scoring Guide; a diagram of steps in The Writing Process; a guide to Writing Strategies; a sample manuscript with peer review annotations; "Putting Together Your Portfolio" guidelines; and seven student essays for peer review on the day of my visit.

In combination, all of these resources reflected the thoughtfulness and preparation of a highly organized, committed and thorough instructor. I had the opportunity to speak with students when I arrived in the classroom who told me that they also found the class Moodle site very helpful, and checked it daily for updates and their assignments.

On the day of my observation, 10 of 11 registered students were present. Mr. Ramser took attendance as he does for each session. The class meeting was near the end of the quarter so the session focused on final polishing of the course materials and skills, and preparing for the culminating assignment. It was immediately evident that Mr. Ramser uses innovative methodology and a high level of interactivity to reinforce crucial and fundamental skills in critical thinking and expression. He uses this same creativity, coupled with focused attention to the essentials of this course's content, to hold the students' attention and enable them to make impressive progress.

Peer editing comprised one of the session's major activities. Mr. Ramser had provided the students with colored highlighters, erasers and notebooks (at his own cost, he informed me, in response to my query), which were used routinely throughout the course. His method of peer review appeared to be both fun and effective. After students shared their essays with each other, they used their colored highlighters to identify component parts of their peers' essays (e.g. topic sentences highlighted in yellow, thesis statements in green, etc.). When they had finished this certainly defined task, they passed the essay back to its writer to incorporate the feedback. The process of distribution was smooth and efficient. The students seemed calm and admirably focused on the assignment.

Throughout the class session, mutual respect was strongly evident among Mr. Ramser and the students. The attitude of the instructor was congenial and friendly, but he was clearly in control of the class at all times. The dialogue between instructor and students consistently reinforced self-efficacy coupled with polite guidance. For example, a student asked, "Is this question correct?" Mr. Ramser's reply—calmly and without irony—was "What do you think?" A series of questions and answers between the student and the instructor enabled the student to arrive at his own answer to the original question, which reinforced the student's skills as an independent learner and critical thinker with pride in his own achievement.

Throughout my class visit, students worked effectively on independent and group tasks. As noted, the instructor was animated and engaged but retained appropriate authority, which led to an extraordinarily substantive meeting. This session also entailed a spirited class discussion on an essay on the ethics of eating, which was the subject of the student essays being shared for peer review. Mr. Ramser led the discussion using such concepts as tone, diction and audience. The students were comfortable with such terms and used them appropriately and confidently.

During discussion, Mr. Ramser referred to the students--and they referred to themselves--by nicknames that he had given to them. These nicknames highlighted positive qualities and self-esteem (e.g. Motivated Maricela, Ambitious Ashley), and the students appeared to enjoy and feel pride in their class nicknames. Each one of the students made a comment during the class discussion, showing the instructor's ability to promote engagement.

During the discussion, Mr. Ramser tied together the tasks of reading and writing with sophistication and evident student comprehension, based on their vocal responses, as he addressed the assigned essay and the students' own essays. For example, he asked them to explain the impact of particular rhetorical strategies, such as placing certain content in the opening paragraph. It was a fine measure of Mr. Ramser's achievements as an instructor that the students were able to answer such complex questions with facility.

This class session had no lulls in its pace, yet the atmosphere felt relaxed and congenial. My overall impression was that of a committed and gifted instructor with equal mastery of course content and teaching skills. It struck me as a model composition class where students were being taught with true excellence resulting in their commensurate progress.

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