

Peer Classroom Observation Report

Faculty Jessica McCaughey

Date of Observation 2/22/17

Observer Carol Hayes

Course and Section UW1010.M71

Number of students present 16 out of 17

Comments:

1. Describe the method(s) of instruction, including detailed descriptions of the different classroom activities.

PRE-CLASS PREPARATION

Prof. McCaughey arrived 7-8 minutes before class was scheduled to set up the classroom. She turned on the LCD projector, put notes on the whiteboard, and greeted students by name as they came in. She then took advantage of the remaining time before class started to ask early-arriving students if they had any questions about the papers due the next class day. Several students took the opportunity to ask her questions. Class began on time, with 16 out of the 17 enrolled students in attendance.

OPENING REFLECTIVE EXERCISE

Prof. McCaughey began the class by asking students to reflect on the feedback they had received on various drafts of the paper (the one due on the next class day), and to share some of the biggest revisions they had made up to this point. Students discussed substantive revisions: re-organizing drafts, recognizing that some forms of evidence weren't working, re-crafting topic sentences; etc. Students referred both to Prof. McCaughey's feedback and to peer feedback. The fact that students were citing peer-to-peer feedback (and not just professorial comments) as having helped with significant revisions is a testament to Prof. McCaughey's development of a strong sense of community in the classroom and a signal that students felt confident enough in the tasks and goals for the assignment that they could give—and receive—meaningful, substantive feedback from one another in ways that helped them reshape their writing.

At the end of this reflective discussion, Prof. McCaughey asked what revisions remained to be completed in the final 48 hours before the paper was due. This question made visible that different types of revision take place at different stages. While up to this point students had discussed revisions that re-conceptualized aspects of their projects, their plans for the final 48 hours focused more on final polishing: revisions to Works Cited pages, double-checking the rubric to ensure that they'd fulfilled all aspects of the assignment, and proofreading. Prof. McCaughey used this

latter point to begin a discussion of the strategies students employed for proofreading (the most popular was reading final drafts aloud).

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING STRATEGIES: RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

Prof. McCaughey then transitioned the class into working on the next major project: an in-depth analysis of social media marketing strategies used by organizations the students had already selected and that they had been observing/analyzing for several weeks. This project would include multiple components:

- An annotated bibliography where students would present scholarly research to establish their expertise in the area in which they would be writing. These sources would then help students evaluate and analyze the social media campaign strategies of the organization they had selected.
- An “un-bibliography” (an idea I may want to borrow for my own classes!), where students were asked to list ten sources they decided *not* to use, including a brief summary and the reason they chose not to include it. This “un-bibliography” is a useful, concrete way to make visible to students the amount of work that goes into selecting the most appropriate sources for a project.

One of the repeated teaching practices that Prof. McCaughey engaged in during this class session was modeling an activity and discussion with the large class, and then breaking the class into small groups to do parallel work. For instance, the main focus of this class session was to introduce these first-year writers to the concept of disciplinarity, and how different disciplines can look at the same topic from very different angles, asking different research questions and using different evidence to answer those questions. To teach this concept, Prof. McCaughey chose a broad topic—global warming—and asked students to think about which disciplines (majors at the university) might be interested in global warming, and what research questions those disciplines might ask about it. The full class went through two such examples before Prof. McCaughey divided the class into groups of four to discuss something more specific: two YouTube videos from Nike’s recent “equality” campaign. She showed both videos, and then asked each small group to analyze the rhetorical situation to which each video responded, and then to brainstorm six disciplines that might raise interesting research questions about each video, along with what those questions might be.

The small groups spent approximately 15 minutes working on the task. Prof. McCaughey helped pace the groups with occasional prompts (i.e., “If you’re still analyzing the rhetorical situation of the two videos, wrap up that conversation and move into brainstorming six possible disciplines that might connect to the videos”). I shadowed one group, which remained on task the entire time, with all group members participating. The group struggled initially with identifying disciplines that might connect to the videos; they came up with topics (“these videos are about athletics”), rather than disciplines that might provide analytical lenses for the videos. Prof. McCaughey circulated among the groups, helping nudge students into identifying actual academic disciplines that might relate to the videos. By the end of the 15 minutes, each group was able to report back to the larger class six disciplines they had

brainstormed, as well as specific questions those disciplines might ask about the videos. This transition from thinking in terms of topics (“what is this video about?”) to thinking in terms of disciplines (“what disciplines might be interested in this video, and how?”) was a major mental shift for the students. While they clearly found it challenging, they also rose to that challenge with Prof. McCaughey’s support.

Prof. McCaughey then transitioned students into applying what they had just learned about disciplines to their own individual projects—the social media campaigns they had been analyzing for the first paper. Prof. McCaughey asked one student to use the campaign he had selected as a classroom model: he briefly reminded the class which campaign he had selected. The class then helped him brainstorm possible disciplines that might raise interesting questions about that campaign. After having the full class discuss several such student models, Prof. McCaughey then handed out what she called an “empty outline”: a handout that provided students with a blank template of the brainstorming they had just been doing with their peers. It listed a number of possible disciplines that might relate to many of their projects, and then gave three spaces next to each discipline. In those spaces, students could write possible discipline-based research questions about the campaign they were planning to analyze for their major projects. There was also a space for potential search terms or phrases that students could use to search library databases to find scholarly articles to help them answer those questions.

This template worked brilliantly to provide students with scaffolded support in applying that class day’s broader discussions about disciplinarity to their individual projects. Prof. McCaughey gave the students a full ten minutes to fill out at least part of the template, and asked everyone to keep it as they would draw upon it in their upcoming library sessions. This preparation for the upcoming library session ensured that students would go into that library session with specific goals, ideas for research, and disciplinary interests that the librarian could then tap into, so that each student would be able to implement and practice—in ways that would feel immediately meaningful—working with the library databases.

THE LAST FIVE MINUTES

Prof. McCaughey dedicated the final five minutes of class to a checking in with the students, asking them whether they felt more comfortable about conceptualizing their upcoming projects in relation to disciplinarity. She also explained the homework for the next class session: in addition to handing in final drafts of their first projects for the semester, she also asked them to read four sample proposals—deliberately selected for the very different approaches they took to the assignment—and identify the arguments the writers were making in each section, as well as the disciplines the research was coming from.

2. What writing and/or research goals did the class work towards? Did the level of challenge seem appropriate?

The class worked on the following writing and research goals:

- Understanding—and practicing--rhetorical analysis (analysis of the audience, context, goals, and genre of communication for several media campaigns)
- Understanding how disciplinarity impacts writing, from the types of evidence used in different disciplines, to the types of research questions asked.
- Practicing asking research questions
- Practicing library database searches by brainstorming search terms, and thus beginning to conceptualize how a database search is different from a Google search.

The level of challenge was high: students visibly struggled initially to think about the two videos in disciplinary terms. Prof. McCaughey’s practice of modeling what she wanted students to do first in full class discussion, and then in small group discussions (where she could rotate among the groups to provide support), and then at the individual level (having students think about the disciplines that might be relevant to their individual projects via the “empty outline”) worked beautifully to provide the key scaffolding students needed to achieve this mental shift.

3. Describe student participation. How many students participated? What kinds of questions did they ask? What was the nature of student participation? Were they engaged in critical inquiry?

Fourteen out of the sixteen students contributed multiple times to the full class discussion. The two students who didn’t take part in the full class conversation were both active in the multiple small-group discussions. Prof. McCaughey encouraged and facilitated class discussion both by asking open-ended questions that anyone could respond to and by calling on specific students with more focused questions. Her students responded actively, leading to engaged, thoughtful discussion.

4. How would you describe the overall experience of the class? What adjectives best describe the class dynamic (casual, cooperative, intense, warm, edgy, industrious, etc.)?

The class dynamic was collaborative, cooperative, and warm. Prof. McCaughey called people by name, praised contributions to the class conversation, and generally created a positive, supportive atmosphere.

5. What specific suggestions would you make for this or future classes?

I don’t have any suggestions for future classes; Prof. McCaughey led a smart, effective, class session, and I plan to borrow several of her strategies and approaches, such as the “un-bibliography” and the “empty outline.”