

Peer Observation of Teaching

<i>Instructor reviewed: Jessica McCaughey</i>	<i>Reviewer: Shelley Brundage</i>
<i>Course number: UW1020</i>	<i>Class size: 17</i>
<i>Course title: What is college for? Writing about complex issues and contradictions in higher education</i>	
<i>Undergraduate or graduate? Undergraduate</i>	<i>Required or elective? Required</i>
<i>Date of Observation: October 18, 2021</i>	

Jessica and I have had conversations about teaching and learning in the past and I am happy to provide this review of her teaching. I think we both share a love of teaching and the thrill of assisting students in their learning. I am using the form that my department uses for peer evaluations.

Step 1: Review of syllabus prior to observation

Jessica shared her syllabus with me prior to my class visit. The syllabus is impressive. It is student-centered, engaging, and clear in its objectives, and incorporates many aspects of universal design for learning. The work products are clearly defined and described. Expectations are clearly stated and the entire syllabus welcomes the student into the class and to engage in learning.

I know that Jessica has taught UW1020 before, but this is the first time with this topic. I think the topic of “what is college for?” would be particularly appealing and engaging for first year students to address. Looking at the course schedule, students are given opportunities to reflect on their own college journey (so far) and what they hope to get out of college. The schedule then moves toward more active writing, discussion, and directed peer review. By the time I observed mid-semester, the students were developing arguments for their papers, had located and read at least five citations to support their arguments, and were working on how to write annotations of these articles. The class organization requires students to complete smaller assignments that build into the larger project at the end of class. In short, an incredibly well-thought-out class.

Step 2: Discuss class topic for day of observation; get history of prof’s teaching of course

Jessica provided me with a detailed lesson plan and a list of topics and activities (and rationales for each of them) for the day of my visit. I had an excellent idea of

October 2015: SPHR adapted this form from one developed by Ellen Goldman

<http://tlc.provost.gwu.edu/teaching-assessment-tool> and another by GWUTLC Faculty Advisory Board

<http://tlc.provost.gwu.edu/tenure-promotion> . Both were published by GW’s Teaching and Learning Collaborative.

what to expect before I arrived, and so did the students--they knew exactly what they would be doing in class that day, and were prepared for the in-class work ahead. In fact, many of them began working as the class gathered. The focus of the session was on "full class check in" to see how students were doing, then moving on to writing and editing annotations based on peer feedback.

Step 3: Classroom visit

Rate and comment on each of the areas on the following pages.

I. ESTABLISHING A POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Effectiveness Rating I (circle one): **Emerging** **Evident** **Exemplary**

Provide examples to justify rating:

Jessica greeted students by name and engaged with them as they waited for the class to begin. She made gentle suggestions about what they *could* be doing in the time prior to the class began, so they'd be ahead when class began. Class began with reminders about upcoming deadlines, presented in a "you can do it" way. Very sensitive to students' schedules ("what do you need to do for me over fall break?" answer: nothing!). Jessica acknowledged challenges that occurred during peer review and notes her appreciation of their work. Jessica is very enthusiastic and engaging and upbeat. Jessica gave brief instructions for the first task and the students readily got into groups to begin.

II. ORGANIZING AND MANAGING THE SESSION

Effectiveness Rating II (circle one): **Emerging** **Evident** **Exemplary**

Provide examples to justify rating:

Jessica put the daily schedule on the board and it was obvious how it related to the topics listed on the syllabus. Both the "big picture" (where today's topics fit within the larger course structure) and the "little picture" (why we are doing what we are doing today), were made clear in writing and verbally.

Jessica worked the room as the students met in small groups to discuss their peer feedback to each other. She asked pointed questions ("how did the peer reviews help you" and "what did you get out of it.") to keep them engaged and working.

She successfully got them back on track to listen as a larger group ("Let's pay attention as these questions will likely apply to other groups") when some groups continued talking after time was up. Provided clear and succinct answers, relating back to course topics, assignments, and objectives. There was also a nice summation at the end of each group activity.

III. PRESENTING MATERIAL

Effectiveness Rating III (circle one): Emerging Evident **Exemplary**

Provide examples to justify rating:

Jessica's lecture style is warm and her pacing is excellent. She spoke loud enough to be heard by all. She used the white board and the room technology effectively to support learning.

Jessica provided very clear instructions about what they will be doing in the class (writing annotations). First, she differentiated abstracts from annotations, and reminded the students what function annotations serve. Posed Socratic questions (How are these the same/different?, what if...) to the class and waited until the students engaged and answered. She summarized students' answers, highlighted key differences and linked them to course assignments and the large written assignment. Clear explanations stated about the role that annotations serve in the larger written project, as well as how annotations will contribute to the larger paper.

Provided verbal reminders about prior work and class discussions and how they relate to the task at hand. I think this provided continuity across class sessions.

I found this particular example really excellent: Jessica provided the class with an annotation that she wrote for one of the required readings. Then she told them, "it's not great," so let's discuss "what this annotation is doing right or well" and then "let's tear it apart." This really engaged them.

IV. CONVEYING CONTENT

Effectiveness Rating IV (circle one): Emerging Evident **Exemplary**

Provide examples to justify rating:

The material was clearly related to the students' experiences. Jessica routinely noted why the students needed to know certain material, and how they could use it both for this course, as well as for future courses and research endeavors. As noted above, the course is scaffolded well, with smaller projects supporting a larger project that is the culminating project.

Jessica pointed out, in a positive way, how students are moving from being high school writers to college writers and how this is different. This allowed them to both draw on prior knowledge, but also challenged them to move forward with their writing skills.

I really liked the compare/contrast aspect of the annotation review. I also liked the "higher level" discussion of how to read the abstract and deconstruct the annotation.

Noting that there was no argument included in the abstract but that an annotation must have one. Annotations need to demonstrate our own understanding of the article. So they need to define terms that are critical. This is a really cool discussion, happening on at least two levels; getting into details to include in annotations, and how they are growing as writers and critical reviewers of literature. It also showed students the difference between opinion and facts. After the annotation deconstruction, students got to see a revised version of the annotation, which further supported their learning.

Jessica also pointed students to different resources on campus and on the internet that can support their writing.

V. PROMOTING LEARNING

Effectiveness Rating V (circle one): **Emerging** **Evident** **Exemplary**

Provide examples to justify rating:

From the syllabus and the class content, I can see that the large written paper is broken down into smaller scale “deliverables.” This promotes student learning and likely decreases anxiety regarding the writing a large research paper.

Handled class questions well.

When students did not answer Jessica’s more Socratic questions, she rephrased and waited for an answer.

Once sample annotation and revision have been critiqued, students are asked to review their own draft annotation in the same way. This is pedagogy at its best! Brilliant use of scaffolding to support student learning. It was also quite meta, given that the annotation involved an article about first-generation students adjusting to college!

Queried class to make sure they understood the task prior to engaging in the annotation revision task.

Jessica clearly outlined what she wanted them to do, gave them a time limit (5-7 mins) and the students worked individually. Next, they went on to quick peer review of the annotation they just wrote.

Look at an example, look at yours, look an example from someone else. Looking for info from the prompt given to them before regarding what info should be in annotations. Reminded about the nature of good peer reviewer comments. Thus, learning happened at multiple levels in one task.

A very active and engaging class. Students were actively learning for most of the class. Jessica commented and reminded when necessary, providing clarification, answering questions, and providing encouragement, and managing time.

I suspect that the short timeframes for these two tasks were intentional; just long enough for the students to give/get feedback, but not long enough that their conversations stray to non-class topics.

In larger group, Jessica shared information from questions asked during peer review. Gave examples regarding peer feedback she overheard while students were peer reviewing. Also checked for understanding.

Here is an example of Jessica's engaging way of encouraging student participation and engagement with the course material: "I love this question. Let's talk about this a minute. What's critical is the ability to explain why the article valuable despite its limitations. We are welcoming the gray area in scholarship into our writing and thinking."

Good use of resources available at Gelman (chasing citations video; Zotero workshop)

Citation chasing: using an article they have annotated. Find a section that speaks to you, then find a citation, and then locate the citation itself. Nice use of material that the student already has, to locate new information.

SUMMARY OF TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS

Overall Effectiveness Rating (circle one): **Emerging** **Evident** **Exemplary**

Jessica is an exceptionally gifted educator. She organizes her class and assignments in ways that promote student learning and engagement. She provides a safe and welcoming learning environment in the classroom. GW is lucky to have her!