



February 22, 2011

TO: Charlotte Hogg, Associate Professor, WPA & Director of Composition
FROM: Joddy Murray, Associate Professor, Director of Undergraduate Studies
SUBJ: Laura Knudson's ENGL 20803 Class Observation

On February 22nd, 2011, I observed Laura Knudson's English 20803: Intermediate Comp— Writing Argument, section 075 (15:30 – 16:50). The class took place in REE 120, the English computer lab, and students were working on their 2nd project for the semester: a "Rhetorical Case Study" in which students were to "research and analyze primary materials" important to a local community defined by the student. Today, students were beginning to develop their topics which were due on 2/24, as well as begin finding and evaluating sources.

The class started on time with Laura Knudson asking students to read a New York Times article she linked from eCollege called "A Prescription for Fear" (Feb 6th, 2011). Students quickly settled down and began reading while Ms. Knudson took role. After about six minutes, students learned that the reason she asked them to read the article was so they could consider some advice by the author on how to determine if a website is credible (given the context of medical information), and that the same advice may be helpful as they begin their own research for the upcoming project.

The rest of class consisted of two parts: a twenty-five minute presentation on the TCU library and working with sources, and a thirty-five minute discussion about paper topics. First, Ms. Knudson lectured on the Mary Coats Burnett Library, providing some significant history of the library as well as some very basic information on how to use its full-text databases, newspapers, RefWorks citation software, and research librarians. Her prepared PowerPoint presentation incorporated bullet points and images that, she stated, would help students recognize some of the best general databases available for research. The second part of class asked students to announce their topic ideas for the unit 2 project, even if those ideas are still tentative. Here, Ms. Knudson suggested an example that came from a student conference earlier that day, and then asked for more ideas. When only a few came, she then asked students to investigate ideas using an online search engine while she circulated and answered questions. Finally, she then began filling the board with several ideas volunteered by students as they asked whether that idea could be a viable topic for their papers.

Though there was not much of an opportunity for student involvement during the presentation about TCU's library, Ms. Knudson did connect the tools she highlighted with the "Rhetorical Case Study" project. She also mentioned the NY Times article again as an example of determining the credibility of sources, weaving together the reading done at the beginning of class with the library material so to provide even more relevancy for the lesson's activities. Students did become much more forthcoming with their involvement after they had a chance to

do some searching for their topics using the computers at each station. Soon thereafter, several students wanted confirmation whether their ideas for topics were acceptable.

At the end of class, Ms. Knudson asked if anyone had any questions for her. After hearing none, she dismissed class at 3:43.

During the discussion of topics, Laura Knudson was enthusiastic when given ideas to put up on the board. She moved about in the classroom, not hesitating to move to the middle of the class to make her point or engage a student. Her overall demeanor was engaging and she often complimented her students on the quality of the topics she heard. There were some lulls in activity when she needed to write on the board or call up a website for projection, but she was sure to connect one activity to another in order for students to understand how the material could help them with the tasks at hand. She answered questions quickly and respectfully, and she held students' attention for most of the lesson.

Some aspects of Ms. Knudson's pedagogy may benefit from having more structure to her class. Since I received a complete lesson plan before observing her, I know that she plans well for her lessons and has a blueprint when she teaches. She might also share that preparation with her students, either by announcing the plan for the lesson at the beginning of class, or by posting a short outline of the activities for the day on the board. I would also encourage Ms. Knudson to provide reminders and examples of key terms being used as she asks questions of students: terms like *community*, *ethos*, and *audience* were key to the lesson and were obviously not entirely clear to students (though it is likely these terms were covered in previous lessons). In addition to structure and a review of key terms, I would also recommend Ms. Knudson work to segment and structure her use of presentational aids and course materials: more organized board work, more summary of points covered, more student interaction in small groups, etc. It is understandable, however, that choices have to be made about how to best spend the limited time available in any given class, but a little more organization may help maximize this time. Finally, using material in the textbooks or copied from a handbook may help summarize some of the material covered in this lesson in a more efficient manner, allowing more time for student work and discussion.

Generally, though, Laura Knudson's Intermediate Composition class was well facilitated and showed signs of active learning. I applaud the way she constantly wove the course material with the project students were working on, and it is my observation that this class was engaged and clearly motivated by their instructor to learn.



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