

Peer Observation of Dr. Melissa Wehler

On November 2, 2017, I had the opportunity to observe Dr. Wehler's Selected Topics in Film. Melissa has developed an excellent rapport with her students. Conversations prior to the start of class seemed personable and comfortable. That friendly atmosphere persisted throughout the lesson, and Melissa came across as both passionate and accessible in her teaching. Melissa began the class by reviewing the day's agenda and providing students with reminders and information related to registration, advising, internships, and capstone. While this was beyond the scope of the subject matter, it demonstrated her deep commitment to her students and her willingness to help them succeed in any way possible. She then moved from these preliminary reminders to more specific information about the upcoming final project.

Melissa introduced the project in a way that minimized student anxiety. She reminded students of the paper component that she had explained in the previous class, and checked for comprehension before explaining the second component, a video presentation. By reviewing each piece of the assignment on a separate day, Melissa allowed time for students to review and process instructions before adding to their anxiety with the presentation component. Melissa explained the reasons behind pedagogical decisions and made students feel more comfortable with the unfamiliar terrain of video presentations. Students visibly relaxed as she talked them through the process with reassurances and answered their questions. During this discussion, two students arrived to class late, but Melissa did not allow this to disrupt the class. She provided them with the materials being discussed without acknowledging the interruption or breaking the thread of her discussion. Ordinarily, I would not comment on student tardiness as part of a teaching observation, but I was impressed with how seamlessly Melissa handled the latecomers.

Melissa opened discussion of that day's content (*Supergirl*) by asking students for their general impressions or observations. Students seemed comfortable and confident in contributing to the discussion, and Melissa responded to comments and questions by providing background and context to further their thinking. Melissa then transitioned to the lecture portion of class. She drew connections to earlier conversations about the roles of women in comics and to cultural theories and ideologies that helped to shape character adaptations over time. She brought in personal experiences and current events to highlight the relevancy of the discussion. Most impressively, Melissa spent the first half of the presentation building a case for a critical viewing of the show as anti-feminist before offering a counterpoint to each of those interpretations in the second half. This technique seemed highly effective at fostering critical thinking. The lecture relied heavily on student participation, and students seemed both intellectually engaged and entertained. Students contributed to the discussion without waiting to be asked for input. They were able to bring in terminology from earlier course discussions, demonstrate close-reading techniques, and even offer counterpoints to some of Melissa's claims. The only negative I observed was two moments of miscommunication, where Melissa heard something different from what a student had said. In both cases, the student chose not to correct the instructor.

To maintain the energy of the 2 hour class, Melissa divided time up effectively, switching to a small group activity after the interactive lecture. She asked students to compile their own specific observations and then bring them back to the larger class. The group discussions were animated and passionate, and students invited Melissa to engage in some of their debates. Throughout the 2 hour session, Melissa kept students intellectually stimulated and engaged in the critical process. The level of active engagement she inspired for an 8:50am class was impressive, and students seemed reluctant to end the discussion when the class had ended.