Report of Classroom Visitation

Professor: **Kevin Taylor**   Date: **Tues. Oct. 22, 2019**
Course: **CAGD 117**   Evaluator: **Nathaniel Heggins Bryant (ENGL)**

Fill blanks with one of the following descriptions:
Poor, Marginal, Average, Very Good, Excellent, Not Evaluated, or Not Applicable.

1. The instructor communicates concepts well   <u>Very Good</u>

2. The presentation was clear and understandable   <u>Very Good</u>

3. The presentation was well organized   <u>Excellent</u>

4. Illustrations or other demonstrations were   <u>Very Good</u>

appropriate and clear

5. The instructor speaks clearly and distinctly   <u>Excellent</u>

6. The instructor had no distracting mannerisms   <u>Not Applicable</u>

7. Instructor's use of class participation contributed to   <u>Average</u>

the students' learning process

8. The instructor's stimulates student interest   <u>Excellent</u>

9. Overall evaluation of this class   <u>Very Good-Excellent</u>

Comments: See Attached Narrative/Assessment

_____   _____
Instructor Signature   Evaluator Signature

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To whom it may concern,

I had the pleasure of observing Kevin Taylor's CAGD 117 lecture/assignment discussion on Tuesday Oct. 22, 2019. Below are some brief observations about the class structure/organization, what worked well, what could be improved upon, and an overall assessment of the class.

Class Description/Synopsis

Class began a few minutes late because I didn't let Kevin know that I was already in the classroom; this is my fault, because I sat in the very back corner and was partly obscured by the space of the classroom itself (more on that later).

Kevin began the class with a brief recap of the syllabus and where students should be in terms of concepts, principles, and class assignments. He did a good job of reminding students of material and concepts already covered while moving forward with new concepts and principles, and he also did well to let them know that the class itself would be shifting in the second half of the semester, which would entail adding new principles and strategies but would also consist of applying prior material and concepts in the execution of new coursework and assignments.

After these introductory remarks, he asked that all students log in to Blackboard, mark their attendance, and open up Assignment 5. With it in front of them, he then slowly read through the assignment, pausing here and there to discuss rationales of the assignment and some mechanics and things to consider regarding how to turn it in, how much it counted in terms of the final grade, and the like. The assignment itself is an interesting exercise in developing a storyboard rendering of a sequence, from 30 seconds to a minute long, of something already filmed, animated, etc. Students would effectively storyboard the sequence using different shots, shot lengths, angles, and the like. They would include the original version in a column on the left and then include their own renditions on the right. In total, he spent about fifteen minutes or so going over the assignment and fielded a few questions from students before going into his prepared lecture for the class, which began at 4:25, on Concept Art and Storybuilding.

To his credit, Kevin encouraged both notetaking (with a gentle nudge reminding why handwriting notes is actually useful) as well as other forms of keeping up, including taking pictures of the slides with smartphones; at one point he acknowledged this openly and gave students more time to take pictures of particularly important PowerPoint slides. Students did both through his lecture. The lecture covered a long list of camera shots, angles, and techniques, things he did a masterful job of demonstrating through humorous and accessible examples from Hollywood films that many of the students were already familiar with (*Pulp Fiction*, *Inglorious Basterds*, *Avengers*, and the like). He also did a nice job of recovering from a rather awkward encounter when a colleague from his department walked in unbidden and unexpected, interrupted the lecture, and talked with Kevin in the front of the entire class for a few moments over something that probably could've been communicated after class or via email. Students clearly saw this as disruptive, and their body language betrayed the idea that this has happened before, but Kevin did well to deal with the disruption politely and move on.

After concluding the lecture in the class, Kevin opened things to discuss the principles he covered as well as elicit questions about the assignments, and many students participated, asking solid, meaningful questions that ranged from technical considerations to clarifications of certain principles about how and why angles, camera movements, and the like are used. He also provided an example of a previous student's work to demonstrate what he was looking for in their own versions of Assignment 5, too.

Once it seemed like students' concerns were satisfactorily addressed, he transitioned to the last segment of the class, which lasted for about the final half hour (roughly) of the class. It was devoted to tying together many of the principles discussed in the lecture with the assignment covered at the beginning of class. Kevin did this by having students immediately put into practice the principle of storyboarding; he gave them the broadest outline of a story sequence and required four different images to be used to tell that story. He wrote the directions on the board and timed the drawing exercise for each cell in the storyboard, giving them four or five minutes to accomplish each on their tablets. Before letting his students go, he went over (one final time) what students should do to prepare for Thursday's class, which would entail a brief recap of the content covered for Tuesday's lecture as well as much more hands-on work where he would circulate among the students and ask to see what short clip they decided upon. He concluded by making sure that they saved and uploaded work to a specific place in Blackboard before leaving.

Strengths/What Went Well

Kevin has a breezy, easy rapport with his students that rests on a great deal of personal identification (they are all united in shared interests and a clear love for popular culture), mutual respect, and quite a bit of humor. Students—and I—laughed quite a bit at his jokes, which weren't off color by any means. He chose great textual examples from films he knew students would talk about, and, quite frankly, he sustained student interest and participation in a lecture held in a large, dark, and awkward classroom setting for quite a bit of time.

I also appreciated the sheer amount of sign-posting he did, conceiving of this class as a pivot point for the entire semester. This was both formal—linking the new assignment to principles covered in previous weeks—and informal, in many comments he made during his lecture that nevertheless look backward to earlier work. He handled this deftly; it was an easy way for Kevin to remind students of what they've already learned and a way of disrupting the potential weight and inertia that comes from lengthy lectures.

I appreciated that he used all of the availing tech in the class to make sure students were doing what they needing to do to succeed—checking in regarding attendance; having them all open the new assignment together; working on their tablets; saving their work in unison.

The lecture itself covered an impressive amount of information but didn't feel boring. And this comes from someone who personally abhors lecturing for more than ten minutes and who has a hard time simply sitting still and taking things in. More than anything else, I found this to be the most impressive part of Kevin's practice.

Criticisms/Thoughts on Improvement

Most of my comments here are contextual—they are minor suggestions for improvements based largely on constraints that derive from the physical space of the classroom itself. There are two rather large weight-bearing columns in the classroom, including one in the literal center of the classroom that must be taken into account when discussing interactions (or lack thereof) between instructor and student. It is also a rather large and cavernous space, the lights of which were off for nearly the duration of the class (well before class started until about the time Kevin asked that students begin working on his final prompt). Students sitting in the back can refer to two large screens on either side of the class, which are centered along either wall, but even then, there are blind-spots and/or angles that make smaller font particularly difficult to read. Knowing this, Kevin asked that students pull things up on the screens directly in front of students, but the middle two rows, as far as I could see, opted instead to look at the two large screens in the middle of the class. So, with this in mind, I think making the font much larger on text-heavy displays would be useful for addressing basic student accessibility issues.

As Kevin required constant use of the tech cabinet and the master display in the class itself, he was effectively chained the front of the class, which poses certain difficulties when trying to interact with the entire class. He tends to defer to those handful of outspoken students directly in front of him and to his left—he had more interaction from the left side of the classroom than the right unless students spoke up from the right and garnered his attention. This is also true of the one time he made use of the white board—what he wrote was on the left side (the side he defers to), rather than the right, and it was also rather difficult to see. Either writing directions on both sides or (the more efficient and economical solution) to have the directions already typed up in a Word document with clear, big font, would help.

He also sat during a vast majority of the class, which meant, from my vantage point, that I could either see the top of his head, or the entirety of his face (depending on which way he turned), but he also appeared like a disembodied voice from time to time, too. I bring both of these issues up—sitting down for the duration and only locating himself in the front of the class—because a simple solution, such as having a wireless presentation clicker, would allow him to be more mobile and perhaps to engage more of the class on all sides (left and right, front and back) in a consistent basis through longer lectures. I also raise this as an issue because students toward the back sometimes had their hands up for more than a minute waiting to be called on, but because of a combination of the column, the darkness in the class, the physical distance between instructor's tech cabinet/chair and students, and certain tendencies of his to defer to one side over another, it took him quite a while to see them and respond.

One final thought about increasing student participation: I think Kevin missed a chance to have students participate early on in the class when he read the assignment out loud to the class rather than having students volunteer to read parts of it themselves. This would help him preserve his own vocal cords in advance of a long lecture but also give students one more way to chime in and be heard in a low-stakes, informal way.

Overall Assessment

In spite of my above recommendations, I feel Kevin requited himself quite well. His students are clearly invested in their mutual endeavors with him; they seem to enjoy the class and take it seriously. I appreciated the way he covered material; as someone with a film background, too, he did a great job explaining a number of principles in a way that would translated to meaningful application in an interesting upcoming assignment. Long story short, Kevin did an excellent job, his students are in great hands, and his colleagues are lucky to have him.

Best,

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