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ENGL 388V

Prof. Lyra Hilliard

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Class Observation Reflection

When I first walked into Jenna's 101S classroom, I immediately noticed how lively the students were; they talked with each other about their weekends and shared feedback on their recent assignments. Jenna and I walked to the front of the classroom and took our seats at the head of a rectangle of students. Professor Kim followed behind us shortly, and before the class could sink into an obedient silence, he brought them together with a quick story about his weekend.

Jenna's class is similar to mine in a few ways. First, both of our classes are discussion based and are therefore arranged in a rectangle. We also cover the same assignments, like the rhetorical analysis, the inquiry assignment, and the final position paper. Her and I share similar responsibilities as well. We are both in charge of grading certain projects. Jenna grades everything but the final papers in her class. I grade discussion boards and help evaluate participation grades. We also work in similar ways to make sure that the students are involved in the discussion. Sometimes that involves leading discussion segments, which Jenna and I both did when we observed each other, but sometimes it can be as simple as being physically present in the classroom.

Jenna's day-to-day routine is to spend the majority of the class grading student assignments while lightly following the lecture. When she finishes the grading for the day, she jumps into the class and contributes to discussion when necessary. On the day I observed her, Jenna also requested feedback from her students on an assignment that she designed on her own. She noticed a problem: students were having trouble fully contributing to their in-class peer reviews. She took it upon herself to write up a proposal and present it to Professor Kim. He approved her idea for an online peer review and built the assignment for the students, and after the students completed it, they provided feedback to Jenna and Professor Kim. They gave positive and negative feedback, which gave the instructors a great gauge for improvement.

The professor wrote up the itinerary for the day on the board and moved through it faithfully (he even drew little papers on the board and wrote the titles of the assignments inside.) He often deferred to Jenna for validation as he attempted to quell the students' concerns about the upcoming inquiry assignment. They have a back-and-forth relationship that appears to be a partnership. The class belongs to the professor until he specifically hands it off to Jenna, but I would imagine that she is free to provide input at any time she feels it would be necessary. Professor Kim called on students by name without waiting for them to raise their hands. I think this is an amazing way to keep the students engaged; they feel like their input is important when he calls on them, but they have to pay attention in case he chooses them.

Overall, the students seem engaged in the material and ready to eagerly participate in the discussion. At one point, two students did take out their laptops and distracted themselves from the lecture, but Jenna quickly and quietly asked them to put them away (without disturbing the professor's lecture at all!) The students felt willing to share personal stories. One student even shared the first page of a draft with the class for Professor Kim to workshop. The students were quick to offer their feedback on this one student's paper, and when they finished, the professor brought their specific examples into a wider frame of reference to help them all on their own versions of their drafts. These drafts were the same drafts reviewed in Jenna's peer-critique activity. When the lecture section of the class ended, the students met with their partners from the homework. They all immediately moved and started workshopping new versions of drafts. Jenna and her professor sat at the front of the room and answered questions that came to them from various students.

Jenna and I met after our observations and compared how interesting it is that the same class can be taught in completely different ways. The experience actually got me excited and had me speculating what being a teaching assistant for a professional writing class might be like. We both realized that we had similar relationships with our professors and our students. I seem to be more involved in my discussion than she is, but she has more responsibilities outside of the classroom than I do. We enjoy our positions as TAs and expressed how glad we were to get to share our experiences with each other. I even learned a few tricks that I'm going to share with my professor that I think could improve our class!