

**From:** Richard Middleton-Kaplan  
**Sent:** Friday, November 28, 2014 5:06 PM  
**To:** Andrew Wilson  
**Subject:** Observation of Kathryn Weller

Dear Professor Wilson,

At your request, I observed English Department adjunct faculty member Kathryn Weller teach English 101, Sec. 061, from 8 a.m. until 9:15 a.m. on Wednesday, November 12. Kathryn conducted a well-paced session consisting of multiple tasks, careful planning, deep levels of student engagement, and transparent pedagogic purpose.

Eight (8) students were present at the start, eventually climbing to sixteen (16). This class session centered on various stages of Product 4: Argument, part of which involves writing three (3) 500-word memos "proposing a rhetorical product designed to persuade a different audience of the validity of your position on the issue" (as stated on the assignment sheet). Proposals for the assignment were due on this day, so Kathryn began by collecting those and answering student questions. She answered all queries respectfully, helpfully, and encouragingly; for example, in response to one student's question about MLA citation for Web sources, Kathryn took students to the Bedford/St. Martin's site for MLA documentation guidance, and to another student who asked whether a header was required, Kathryn responded, "That's a good question" before answering. She has clearly established a respectful, comfortable rapport with the class.

Kathryn used the term and concept "rhetorical product" to apply a broad range of genres, and this proved practical in leading the class through an analysis of a visual image. The image at hand, selected by Kathryn, was an illustration of the United States with the word VOTE in the center and a variety of images positioned on the map (a white picket fence along the southwestern border, a foreclosed house in the northwest, a cross and Star of David and crescent near the center, and so on). Kathryn led the class through exercises which simultaneously served several purposes: giving students practice at noticing, describing, and analyzing; enhancing students' visual literacy skills; illustrating the ways in which an argument can be embedded in an image, and distinguishing between appeals to logos, ethos, and pathos; and preparing students for their upcoming assignment in constructing an argumentative rhetorical product in the form of an image. Each student was invited to contribute an observation, and each student did; the entire class was energetically engaged in this discussion. Kathryn pointed out that everything in this pro-voting ad is there for a purpose, and that the rhetorical product which students construct should also be purposeful about everything which students put there.

After this engaging exercise in rhetorical analysis and visual literacy, Kathryn led the class through two explicitly political ads (one pro-Obama and one pro-Romney from the 2012 election), further honing student skills at analyzing verbal and visual elements subtly deployed to construct a persuasive argument. She paused to make clear the purpose of the activities, explaining how they are directly related to the upcoming assignment: Use this kind of descriptive detail in describing your proposal for a rhetorical product, she advised. Students in Kathryn's class are not asked to perform tasks with no explanation of the task's value; at every step, she makes her pedagogical purpose transparent.

Next, students were asked to take out their proposal worksheets and were given peer critique worksheets. Assigning the students to pairs, she then had them read each others' proposals and fill out the peer review sheet. "If you don't love what you have, let your partner help you get there," Kathryn said, thereby validating the value of peer critiques while encouraging students to think they could achieve their aims. Kathryn gave her students agency, freedom to learn from and teach to one another, and freedom to engage each other independently. There was focused silence while students filled out the forms, and then once they turned to discussing those forms with their peers they became animatedly engaged. Two students near me had a very good conversation about the difficulties they have with writing...and possible solutions. Kathryn circulated around, answered questions, and sat down with one pair to listen intently to their concerns and help them move forward with their proposals.

I should also point out that during the 75 minutes I was present, Kathryn made use of a well-organized Blackboard course shell as well as a Google Dropbox and the Bedford/St. Martin's site. She seems comfortable with and in command of technology as a tool to reach students, identify resources, and enhance learning.

Pair discussions were wrapping up at 9:15 a.m. when I had to leave, and Kathryn was moving the class toward the next segment of their activities for the day. She had thoughtfully planned a variety of activities, each of which related to the Project 4: Argument that they were working on.

Respectfully submitted,  
Richard M-K, English Dept.