

Classroom Evaluation of: Dr. Karen Kaiser Lee

Faculty Evaluator: Dr. Shannon Ambrose

Term of Evaluation: Spring 2018

On Wednesday February 14, 2018, I observed Dr. Kaiser Lee in her Study of Rhetoric course [ENGL 208]. Before my visit to her classroom, I was able to examine her course syllabus, which contained a detailed explanation of her course objectives, class assignments, grading criteria, and classroom policies designed to enhance learning and student engagement in the course.

I was impressed by the interesting range of texts on the syllabus, which students accessed through their textbook, an anthology titled *The Rhetorical Tradition*, and through the Canvas platform. I thought the amount of reading was perfectly adjusted to fit the main goals of her course, particularly in terms of developing students' ability to engage in close reading and to define, identify, and understand rhetorical devices and concepts. Throughout her syllabus, Dr. Kaiser Lee identifies and assigns manageable portions of the texts for each class, and there she places more emphasis on absorbing and finding connections among moments or *sites* in a range of texts that represent encounters with rhetoric than upon developing a protracted or "unified" interpretation of any single work. What was clear from my perusal of her course documents, and my visit, is the extent to which Dr. Kaiser Lee critically engages students in ways that result in high-impact learning, which, in turn, creates a meaningful and stimulating learning environment.

Dr. Kaiser Lee began her class with some observations about her expectations for the students' upcoming assignments, wherein she encouraged her students to challenge themselves in their homework, to go beyond identifying the appeals of ethos, logos, and pathos in their assessments. Having answered the students' preliminary questions about their forthcoming assignments, she initiated a discussion about the process of letter writing, and she encouraged the students to talk about their own experiences with that genre. After that initial conversation, she moved the students into a discussion of the previous night's reading, asking the students what they marked in the assigned texts, what they noticed as important there, and what they could connect between the that material and the readings covered earlier in the course. Students responded in an engaged fashion to Dr. Kaiser Lee's questions about the inherent rhetorical challenges of letter writing, and they were eager and able to make connections between their immediate assignments and previous texts. The students interacted enthusiastically to their peers' contributions, and it was obvious that they felt comfortable voicing their opinions in the classroom.

Dr. Kaiser Lee then moved the discussion to the widespread practice of texting, a more modern mode of personal communication, and asked the students about the rhetorical conventions and expectations of that genre of expression. That conversation was quite lively as some of the students held very strong viewpoints about what was considered good praxis in the creation of a text message. After that lively exchange, Dr. Kaiser Lee moved the students to a small-group project. Their task was to create a rhetorically-informed guide to texting, and, to help students in that work, Dr. Kaiser Lee wrote prompts on the whiteboards in the class. I noticed that the students consistently referred to Dr. Kaiser Lee's suggestions, which enabled them to stay on task with the creation of their guide. Dr. Kaiser Lee allotted a full 15 minutes allotted for the group work, and this seemed a truly appropriate measure for that activity, especially as most students were winding up their work by the end of that time. Dr. Kaiser Lee then brought the students together and asked the groups to report out on the contents of their texting guides. In this segment of the class, the students shared their findings easily and immediately; indeed, they seemed invested and interested in the activity. The students responded to their peers' guides and suggestions, and there was a solid sense of collaboration in the classroom, which is always a sought-after [and not always achieved] dynamic.

Dr. Kaiser Lee wound up class discussion by sending around a list of comments on the students' mini essays, which they had completed and submitted a couple of weeks prior. She provided general feedback for students on how they might craft or improve on their assignments, and she discussed the importance of that feedback in scaffolding their written assignments; that is, she stressed the value of using the lessons learned on the mini-essays to draft [and improve on] the next written assignment. She reviewed citation praxis with the students and provided review questions for the course readings, all in aid of helping students to think about—and write about—text in a meaningful way.

Dr. Kaiser Lee modulated the pace of the class very well and kept the students motivated and interested in the day's work. The students maintained their involvement throughout the class meeting, and they responded well to Dr. Kaiser Lee's use of her own experiences with texting and letter writing to talk to students about the rhetorical practices inherent in those kinds of writing activities. Ultimately, Dr. Kaiser Lee was able to sustain the engagement of the students in a thoughtful, accessible way, and her use of pacing and technology in the classroom is something that all of her departmental colleagues—regardless of rank—could learn from.

In observing this class, I identified the same strengths of Dr. Kaiser Lee's teaching that I had observed two years earlier, when I attended her Advanced Writing class. In my assessment of that

visit, I noted the carefully constructed syllabus designed to encourage student identification of patterns and threads throughout a challenging body of texts. I also commented then upon the intellectual energy and excitement that she models when making connections and noting contrasts in rhetorical praxis. It seems to me, however, that in the two-year interim, Dr. Kaiser Lee has developed an even wider range of useful strategies to draw out the insights of her students, enabling them to “test” the tentative connections they were gleaning and to validate their applications of abstract theory to the concrete detail of rhetorical praxis.