

NEW YORK CITY COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY
OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

POST OBSERVATION CONFERENCE MEMORANDUM

Date of Discussion: March 22, 2018

Observation date: March 8, 2018

Candidate's Name: Jason Ellis

Department: English

Representatives Present

Course & Section: English 1710, section D514

Name of Observer: Carole K. Harris

Name of Observee: Jason Ellis

Date Observation Filed _____ with Chairperson _____

P&B member or other assigned by chairperson _____

(Attach additional pages if necessary.)

Signed Carole K. Harris Title Associate Professor

I understand that my signature means only that I have read this memorandum and that I may attach any comments I wish.

Staff Member's Signature [Signature] 3/22/2018
6/96 date

FACULTY CLASS ROOM OBSERVATION REPORT Year 2018

Untenured

Tenured

Department: English
Course/Section: English 1710, D514

Name of Observee: Ellis, Jason Rank: Assistant Professor

Name of Observer: Carole K. Harris Rank: Associate Professor

Date of Observation: March 8, 2016 Room: G-603

Lesson Topic & Brief Summary:

This lesson was designed to help students review texts by the nine authors they had read up until this moment in the semester (including Ted Chiang, Nicholas Wade, Walter Ong, Jacques Derrida, and Donna Haraway), as well as aid them in understanding the new reading, Katherine Hayles's Prologue and Chapter One of *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*.

This course (four credits, four hours) meets twice a week for 100 minutes. In today's class Professor Ellis spent about twenty minutes reviewing announcements, twenty-five minutes giving a PowerPoint lecture summarizing past readings, ten minutes inviting students to share their views on Hayles, and forty-five minutes giving a lecture on Hayles's text.

Please complete each item. This report will be returned unless each category contains supporting comments. Use additional pages if necessary.

- =====
1. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT (prompt start, efficient attendance check):
 Satisfactory Unsatisfactory

Professor Ellis started and ended class on time. He took attendance by passing around a sign-in sheet and did an effective job of using his OpenLab site to review announcements for the day. He made a brief appeal to students majoring in Professional and Technical Writing regarding advisement. (Of the twenty-two students present in the section I observed, fourteen are PTW majors.) Professor Ellis has been assigned to advise them. He swiftly explained a clever "algorithm" of how they should sign up to see him for advisement.

2. PROFESSIONAL TRAITS (professional appearance and demeanor, clarity, volume, and pace of speech; establishment of rapport with students)
Satisfactory Unsatisfactory

Professor Ellis has a friendly and engaging manner with the students. He calls them by name and knows exactly who is doing what for their research project. He likes to suggest supplemental texts to individual students based on their particular research, knowing that at the same time he's introducing all members of the class to a wide range of experts in the field. I particularly loved how he publicized the upcoming lecture about Internet metaphors and the Arabic language offered by the Humanities Department. He reminisced about his own college days at Georgia Tech, about how exciting it was to attend lectures for the sheer joy of learning something new.

At the same time that he's offering students an expansive view of what it means to be in college, he's coaching them on the nuts and bolts of how to manage college life, including how to find college resources online. When one student asked a question about the PTW major, for example, Professor Ellis directed the class to look on the English Department website and find the contact information for Professor Reneta Lansiquot, Program Director of PTW. He paused to describe the college catalog as a Bible, a "contract between you and City Tech." Throughout the lesson, he directed students to take notes; he paused at times to see if there were questions; and he explained in simple terms why they were studying each writer.

3. **SUBJECT MASTERY** (accuracy of presented material, use of appropriate terminology, competence in use of equipment)
Excellent Very Good Satisfactory Unsatisfactory

Professor Ellis has a strong command of the material and has put a lot of time and creative thought into designing his syllabus. It covers a challenging set of texts, one for each class meeting, and each text builds on the earlier readings. The two parts to the day's lecture—both the review of past texts and the summary of Hayles—along with the accompanying PowerPoint presentations, were masterful and I learned a lot. Professor Ellis clearly defined key concepts such as consciousness, materiality, "the enlightened subject" vs. the "posthuman subject," and Skeuomorph. In each case he noted the page number where Hayles uses the term.

The students seemed energized by Professor Ellis's love of the material and appeared to me to rise to the occasion of what at first seemed a brisk pace. I saw them energetically taking notes all around me. The student next to me kept referring to her print out of the Hayles article, which was colorfully annotated in yellow highlighter and blue ink.

Professor Ellis makes good use of OpenLab and the computer classroom.

4. **ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF MATERIAL** (clear statement of objectives, logical sequence, budgeting of time, review, summary, and outside assignments as appropriate)

Excellent Very Good Satisfactory Unsatisfactory

Professor Ellis prefaced his review of earlier texts by saying that the students were now in a position to make connections between concepts, texts, and writers. He made a number of such connections in his lecture, as a way to model for students what they can do in their research projects. This was a good class for me to witness as it gave me a sense of the scope of the course, and it provided a solid review for the students as well.

5. **PRESENTATION OF MATERIAL** (level and clarity of presentation, appropriate use of learning aids)

Excellent Very Good Satisfactory Unsatisfactory

English 1710 ("Introduction to Language and Technology") is one of the foundational courses in the English Department's Professional and Technical Writing major. Because I knew so little about the major, I asked Professor Ellis to explain this course in the context of the major. He described English 1710 as a "foundational course that provides students with theoretical concepts for the practical work that they'll do in later courses." He believes it is important for students to have this theoretical knowledge, especially later in their professional lives, because it gives them the conceptual framework and vision to do groundbreaking work.

As someone with a degree in another interdisciplinary field, Comparative Literature, who loves dealing in theoretical concepts and having students join me in this enterprise, I thoroughly enjoyed Professor Ellis's lesson, and I share his belief in teaching challenging material to our students. I noticed, however, that the class I observed was very lecture heavy: according to my observation, seventy minutes were spent on lecturing and ten minutes were devoted to open discussion. I'm concerned that some students may be able to get through the semester by relying largely on the in-class lectures without doing the reading for themselves.

I preface the following suggestions with a genuine question: what is the role of the lecture format in the Professional and Technical Writing curriculum?

I might gently suggest that Professor Ellis break up his long lectures with some activities to give the students the opportunity to engage with the texts directly, do more writing in class, and perhaps simply move around a bit. Possible strategies might include: start class by giving students a paragraph from the text to "unpack" in their notebook; assign group work on a set of passages; pause during the lecture on Hayles, especially when defining a concept, and call on a student to read a chosen paragraph out loud for discussion. Professor Ellis emphasized a key moment in Hayles (page 24) when she explains the value of her interdisciplinary approach, one that bridges science and

literature. Have the students write about this paragraph! By introducing occasions in class for students to grapple directly with the assigned readings, Professor Ellis might help them deepen their understanding of the writers and their theories.

6. STUDENT-INSTRUCTOR INTERACTION (relevance, variety, and clarity of questions, appropriate recognition of student contributions)
Excellent Very Good Satisfactory Unsatisfactory

Professor Ellis has a nice way of expanding on a student's comment to highlight what is original or important about it. He also very naturally and genuinely addresses the students as a group of professionals. I was particularly impressed by the way he presented Katherine Hayles's biography. In graduate school she made a major break in her academic life by switching from chemistry to the humanities. "Everything I thought I knew was wrong," he quoted her as saying. She subsequently built a career around interdisciplinary studies, in the same way that many of the students in this class are hoping to do. The energizing part of her research, according to Professor Ellis, is that she bridges STEM and the humanities. "We are trying to learn from her strategies." I like that Professor Ellis is including the students in this long line of building on the ideas of our predecessors, and that he is presenting doubt or uncertainty as something to take seriously, as a possible inspiration for new knowledge.

7. OVERALL EVALUATION (categories 1 through 6)

- Excellent
Very Good
Satisfactory
Unsatisfactory

Professor Ellis is giving the students a solid foundation in learning about the leading thinkers in the field of language and technology, and he doubles as an enthusiastic advisor. By his own example, he is encouraging the students to think big and have a vision for their lives. They are lucky to have him!

Visiting his class was an enjoyable experience, and I learned a lot from our discussions about the Professional and Technical Writing major. In fact, I was surprised about how little I knew about the major before this time. I believe our department would benefit as a whole from having more English faculty members become familiar with it.

8. SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT (use additional pages if necessary)

See #5 above.

The acoustics in the room were not good. Professor Ellis projects when he speaks and I had no trouble hearing him. However, I could not hear students when they asked a question. Professor Ellis might consider repeating a student's question before answering it so all can hear.

I have read and have been given a copy of the above report, and so signify by my signature below. I understand that I may attach additional comments to this document.



Signature of Observee

3/22/2018

date



Signature of Observer

3/22/2018

date