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RE: Teaching Evaluation of Lauren DeCarvalho

I observed Lauren teach her Comm 205 section at 10:10 on 4/13 in Wartik 105 as part of her Comm 602 supervised course experience. She got there 10 minutes early to set up her powerpoint, check her clips and answer questions from students as they arrived. She was very organized and had the class tightly scheduled. She began with a question of the day, a kind of warm up question designed to get them talking and moved into announcements for the class. She reminded them about upcoming course assignments and talked about an extra-curricular assignment that she had organized. She then set up the theme for the day, Media Literacy, which she linked to the reading that the class had done and an example drawn from the reading. Before turning to the example, she raised a set of framing questions to get to think about as they looked at the media example. In this case, the example was an episode from the Simpsons featuring director John Waters that dealt with the topic of homophobia and stereotyping. She played 4 short clips from the episode that were emblematic of the issues dealt with in the readings of the day and that spoke to the questions that the class had been addressing throughout the semester.

After completing the clips, she asked the class to break into small groups to discuss and come up with answers to the framing questions raised earlier. I thought that this worked quite well, though there were some people who did not participate and more could have been done to draw them into the first step of the discussion in another way. After a couple of minutes, she then invited the groups to contribute, which they did quite nicely. The discussion was lively, and showed the concepts that the class had gleaned from the semester; it was a good example of effective interactive and recursive pedagogy.

I thought more could have been done to draw the class into discussion of the topic of the day, Media Literacy, and I thought that at times it would have been good to linger on points raised by the different groups and invite the rest of the class to expand on or react to these points, to or come up with different points in the episode of the Simpsons where the issue was raised. This was, I think, a result of the carefully constructed powerpoint, complete with lots of effective point by point animation. Sometimes following the pre-ordained schedule can foreclose moments of conversation, but this was something that Lauren noted herself when we discussed how things went after the class.

It is obvious after seeing her teach that Lauren has a great rapport with the students in her class. They feel comfortable working through their ideas with her, and this is a testament to the way in which she runs the class. In general, her students take the discussions seriously and are comfortable using concepts like hegemony, ideology, gender performativity and polysemy fluidly in conversation. To me, this seems like the mark of a good teacher and a successful semester.