

CLASSROOM VISITATION REPORT

Faculty Visited: Courtney Hermann

Visitor: Prof. Dustin Morrow

Course # and Title: FILM 360 Branded Media

Pre-Visit:

Class Visit: 11/19/18

Post-Visit:

1. Describe and evaluate the instructor's plan for the course.
2. Describe and evaluate the plan for the class session to be visited.
3. Describe and evaluate the activities observed in the class visited.
4. Other comments.



Visitor's signature

Film

Visitor's Department

11/19/18

Date

I have read this report and know that I may submit a response or rebuttal to the school office.

Courtney L. Hermann

Visitee's Signature

FILM

Visitee's Department

11/29/18

Date

List of Attachments

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Classroom Visitation Report for Prof. Hermann

1. *Describe and evaluate the instructor's plan for the course.*

I visited Prof. Hermann's course, "Branded Media" (FILM360) on November 19th, 2018. Prof. Hermann's description of the course is as follows:

FILM 360: Branded Media serves those students in our program who are seeking to apply their filmmaking skills to the production of branded video content for non-profit organizations and small businesses. Those who enroll in the class are typically juniors and seniors. During the term, students meet with clients to determine their needs as they relate to the communication of the organization's brand to a target audience. Students work in groups and individually to generate short video projects that clients may choose to integrate into their marketing communications at the conclusion of the course. Students manage all aspects of production from ideation to delivery. In the process, quality portfolio materials and meaningful resume entries are generated, client-freelancer relationships are modeled, collaboration skills are practiced, and students gain an opportunity to serve in crew positions in which they have a particular interest.

In the first project of the term, students work in pairs and groups of three to produce short video spots profiling a student in the School of Film and positioning the brand of Portland State Film as a vibrant community of scholars and filmmakers to an audience of people interested in studying film and to potential donors to the program. Finished products will show on the public video screen on SW 6th Avenue on the PSU campus beginning in Winter 2019.

The second project, the most significant of the term, asks students to work in groups of five to create a branded video for the non-profit wildlife advocacy organization Oregon Wild. Students meet with the client on three occasions: an introductory meeting where the client describes their mission, marketing needs, and target audiences; a pitch meeting where each group fleshes out one of three brainstormed ideas to pitch to the client; and a final meeting where the nearly finished videos are shown to the clients and feedback is provided to help students arrive at a final cut.

The third and final project of the term is an individual editing project requiring each student to cut a one minute "highlight" reel for Explore Nature, a consortia of environmental conservation organizations on the Tillamook Coast. Representatives from Explore Nature meet with the students early in the term to discuss their need for a video that is social media-friendly and which will entice viewers to seek out more information about the organization. Students will have access about 40 minutes of selected shots, graphics, and music from a recent Explore Nature video campaign and create a one-minute cut promoting the activities highlighted in the original videos. All of the projects are sent to Explore Nature for judging, where representatives will choose their top 3 favorite videos.

In the few years that Prof. Hermann has been teaching full-time for PSU Film, Branded Media has quickly become one of our most popular production courses, and deservedly so. It is among the only courses we offer that seeks to give students an approximation of the real-

world experience of working professionally in collaboration with an actual client. The students gain firsthand knowledge of the process of balancing their own creative instincts with the needs of an outside organization which, as is the case with most clients, likely has little working knowledge of how video productions are realized. Additionally, the course expands the awareness of and reputation of Portland State Film through its interaction with the community, and gives our students the opportunity to potentially put a professional production credit on their resumes prior to graduation.

2. *Describe and evaluate the plan for the class session to be visited.*

On the day I visited Prof. Hermann's class, she began with a review of an assignment in which the students were asked to find and comment on existing branded media videos. The students discussed each other's takeaways from the examples, and evaluated the examples for their effectiveness in the delivery of their messages. This was followed by a screening of the work-in-progress videos that the students are producing as promotional pieces for the Portland State School of Film. The class then consulted and discussed feedback on the videos provided by COTA Marketing and Communications Manager Suzanne Gray and Dr. Mark Berrettini, the Director of the School of Film. Finally, the students provided feedback to each other on the work-in-progress videos they are editing as highlight reels for the environmental conservation consortia of organizations Explore Nature.

3. *Describe and evaluate the activities observed in the class visited.*

In the class session that I visited I was tremendously impressed with the depth and substance of the commentary provided by the students about both the branded media examples and the student project works-in-progress. It is clear that in just eight weeks the students have learned a great deal about the content and structure of branded media and demonstrate sophisticated critical thinking in its analysis. The course effectively mimics a real-world production scenario in which the students are the production crew, Prof. Hermann is the head producer, Dr. Berrettini and Ms. Gray are the focus group, and Oregon Wild and Explore Nature are the clients.

A great deal of material was covered in the session that I attended, but Prof. Hermann facilitated the discussion swiftly without sacrificing substantial analysis. She directed the students to address the production quality as well as the overarching themes and specific content of the videos while constantly reminding them to approach everything through a frame of narrative. Impressively, she remembered specific comments that students made in previous classes. She also addressed issues of race and gender in branded media and how social and political movements can be co-opted by branded campaigns. And she introduced questions about propaganda's relationship with branded content.

Prof. Hermann is clearly a gifted orator and brings an incredible energy to the classroom. She rarely stands still, constantly moving around the class to address different students. I first became acquainted with Prof. Hermann's lively teaching style when I attended a session that she instructed at the University Film and Video Association conference ten years ago on curricular development in documentary filmmaking. She is very popular among our students and clearly an experienced, talented instructor, so it is challenging to find elements of her teaching style to effectively critique.

That said, I do tend to lead critiques in a slightly different way than Prof. Hermann does and I will share those deviations in the interest of providing a different point of view, but not as a direct critique of Prof. Hermann's strategies for leading feedback sessions. Prof. Hermann begins all of her critiques by asking students, "What did you like or not like about this" or "So what did you think of this". I try to avoid broadly evaluative terms like *like* in my critiques, instead leaning toward a direction of the students through the works by asking more specific questions about individual disciplines like cinematography, directing, editing, and sound or by asking them to address specific narrative and thematic aspects of the content. I recognize that there is a limitation in being less open-ended and in not allowing the students to choose the aspect of the work that they wish to critique, but I have found in my teaching that providing rigid guidance in the critique usually leads to a more thorough analysis of the entire work.

I also noticed a pattern in Prof. Hermann's critique in which one in which the students will make a comment and then Prof. Hermann will expand upon and reframe that student's comment. This pattern of 'student comment serving as a faculty prompt' is very common and can be very effective, but I have also found, when there is time to do so, that allowing the students to respond to each other and expand upon each other's commentary *before* I weigh in often leads to interesting debate among them and the valuable experience of sharing ideas with their peers, which will of course benefit of them as future members of professional production teams/crews. In fact, allowing them to speak directly to each other sometimes leads to their covering the feedback that I was about to give them, and it's great to see them arrive at these observations on their own. Of course, it also sometimes leads to long awkward silences when they refuse to engage with each other, but I would rather let those silences sit until they develop a rhythm of talking to directly to each other.

4. *Other comments.*

As stated earlier, I think Branded Media is a very valuable course and has become a key component of our production curriculum. Aside from the experiences of having students work directly with a real clients, I believe that the course's other strengths include the massive amounts of revision that the students are required to do on their projects, which is not always possible in production courses that are offered in ten short weeks; and that students have to pitch their projects and learn that the aspects of writing and speaking are very important to the production process if they want to effectively share their ideas and secure a job.

I feel a little uneasy with the aspect of the course in which the client picks the three top student videos as I think it introduces an element of competition to the production course which is perhaps not necessary. I see its value, as the production world is in fact extremely competitive and students might as well begin to get used to that, but I also think there will be plenty of time for students to experience that competition once they begin working after graduation and that sometimes an element of competition in the university setting inhibits creativity rather than encourages it.

My last piece of feedback would simply be that the course might benefit by introducing mobile media as a viewing platform since phones, computers and tablets are likely the way in which most consumers will view this form of media. The distribution mechanism is often the most

overlooked component of many production courses - I'm guilty of frequently missing it myself. It's more fun to look at video and film work on a big screen, but not as informative.

It's very clear that this is an important course in our curriculum and that Prof. Hermann's development of it and her strategies in instructing it are nothing less than exemplary. It was a pleasure to visit Prof. Hermann's class. She is clearly a gifted educator and continues to be a valuable member of our faculty.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dustin Morrow', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dustin Morrow
Associate Professor, Film
Portland State University