Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness

Christopher Higgs

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I. Overview

The following samples represent a selection of courses taught over the past five years at Florida State University, including official student assessment numbers and discursive comments. Course syllabi for these and all courses taught available upon request. Full course descriptions for these and all courses taught can be found on my website at www.christopherhiggs.org

After the course evaluation samples you will find classroom observation letters written by my First Year Writing Mentors.

Following those letters, you will find a feature story about my pedagogical efficacy, written by a former student for the departmental newsletter at Florida State.

Lastly, I have included the teaching awards I received at each of the three universities where I have taught.

II. Sample Evaluations from Individual Courses

Composition I

Freshman Composition & Rhetoric, Fall 2009

Answer to Question #8 Overall assessment of instructor: 91% Excellent

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Assessment & Testing - Florida State University - Report Created: 09/28/2013 - Semester/Year: Fall/2009

Student Perception of Teaching

Instructor: Christopher Higgs
Department: English
Course: ENC1101 (FRESH COMP & RHETRC) Section#: 42 Ref#: 08325
Evaluation Format: Paper *Course Delivery Format: Classroom-based*
Forms Ordered: 24 Responses: 22 (92%)

Response Scale		Response Scale	
SA = Strongly Agree	= 1	E = Excellent	= 1
A = Agree	= 2	VG = Very Good	= 2
N = Neutral	= 3	G = Good	= 3
D = Disagree	= 4	F = Fair	= 4
SD = Strongly Disagree	= 5	P = Poor	= 5

86% 14% 0% 0% 0%

Section D SUSSAI (State University System Student Assessment of Instruction)

	E	VG	G	F	P	(#)*	MEDIAN*	IQR*
1. Description of course objectives and assignments	13 59%	9 41%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	22	1	1
2. Communication of ideas and information	15 68%	6 27%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	22	1	1
3. Expression of expectations for performance in class	16 73%	6 27%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	22	1	1
4. Availability to assist students in or out of class	17 77%	5 23%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	22	1	0
5. Respect and concern for students	17 77%	4 18%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	22	1	0
6. Stimulation of interest in the course	18 82%	4 18%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	22	1	0
7. Facilitation of learning	20 91%	2 9%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	22	1	0
8. Overall assessment of instructor	20 91%	2 9%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	22	1	0

1. What did you like most about this course? What could be improved? Give examples.

I liked that I wasn't so worried about getting a good grade but actually doing well and my best in this class. I enjoyed the different types of papers we had to write.

2. What did you like most about this instructor? What could be improved? Give examples.

What I liked most was that he was extremely helpful. Really cared about making his students better writers.

1. What did you like most about this course? What could be improved? Give examples.

I really liked the structure and instruction. The work load was managable, and I never felt like I was doing busy work. Every assignment had a purpose, and I really learned a lot. Moreover, I enjoyed our in class discussions.

2. What did you like most about this instructor? What could be improved? Give examples.

He was very knowledgable and passionate. There was never a day that I came to class and didn't learn something. He encouraged me to expand my horizons and stop resting on my laurels. He was amazing.

3. Additional comments and suggestions.

This class was my favorite!

2. What did you like most about this instructor? What could be improved? Give examples.

I liked how he pushed us to think outside of our comfort zone and I feel like I learned a new way to write.

1. What did you like most about this course? What could be improved? Give examples.

The writing projects were challenging but after each one, I felt like a better writer. The last project made me question my major because, using the tools, given to me, I wrote what I thought was the best paper I've ever written.

1. What did you like most about this course? What could be improved? Give examples.

This course enabled me to gain confidence in my writing. I used to never want to share my work with other students for a fear that they might not like it, however now I dont mind when peers read my papers. Also I like how went about things mainly with writing drafts because I was able to simply write my ideas on paper and fix it up after that.

2. What did you like most about this instructor? What could be improved? Give examples.

I liked his approch to everything. The fact that he had us do things in a completely different way was brilliant Now we have other options when writing and know how to go about things.

Composition II

Freshman Writing & Research, Spring 2010

Answer to Question #8 Overall assessment of instructor: 87% Excellent

Assessment & Testing - Florida State University - Report Created: 09/28/2013 - Semester/Year: Spring/2010

Student Perception of Teaching

Instructor: Christopher Higgs
Department: English
Course: ENC1102 (FRESH WRITING RESRCH) Section#: 80 Ref#: 08957
Evaluation Format: Paper *Course Delivery Format: Classroom-based*
Forms Ordered: 25 Responses: 23 (92%)

Response Scale		Response Scale	
SA = Strongly Agree	= 1	E = Excellent	= 1
A = Agree	= 2	VG = Very Good	= 2
N = Neutral	= 3	G = Good	= 3
D = Disagree	= 4	F = Fair	= 4
SD = Strongly Disagree	= 5	P = Poor	= 5

Section D SUSSAI (State University System Student Assessment of Instruction)

	E	VG	G	F	P	(#)*	MEDIAN*	IQR*
1. Description of course objectives and assignments	17 74%	6 26%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	23	1	1
2. Communication of ideas and information	20 87%	3 13%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	23	1	0
3. Expression of expectations for performance in class	20 87%	2 9%	1 4%	0 0%	0 0%	23	1	0
4. Availability to assist students in or out of class	17 74%	4 17%	2 9%	0 0%	0 0%	23	1	1
5. Respect and concern for students	18 82%	4 18%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	22	1	0
6. Stimulation of interest in the course	19 83%	3 13%	1 4%	0 0%	0 0%	23	1	0
7. Facilitation of learning	19 83%	4 17%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	23	1	0
8. Overall assessment of instructor	20 87%	2 9%	1 4%	0 0%	0 0%	23	1	0

Section E Additional Questions, Department

No feedback for this section.

1. What did you like most about this course? What could be improved? Give examples.

The class as a whole was a wonderful experience. I loved the comfortable yet hard working atmosphere.

2. What did you like most about this instructor? What could be improved? Give examples.

I loved having Mr. Higgs! He shouldn't change a thing. I'm recommending him to everyone I know

1. What did you like most about this course? What could be improved? Give examples.

The ability to think outside the box and trust myself in my writing ability.

2. What did you like most about this instructor? What could be improved? Give examples.

Allowed me to grow as an individual in my writing/thinking process

3. Additional comments and suggestions.

Awesome teacher, would recommend/take his class again./enjoyed his class.

1. What did you like most about this course? What could be improved? Give examples.

I liked the challenge because it made me a better writer.

2. What did you like most about this instructor? What could be improved? Give examples.

He was enthusiastic about his job and wanted to educate. That created a good learning environment. No improvements.

3. Additional comments and suggestions.

Thank you.

1. What did you like most about this course? What could be improved? Give examples.

the discussions, meeting with the teacher one on one

2. What did you like most about this instructor? What could be improved? Give examples.

he didn't look down upon us made us seem important

3. Additional comments and suggestions.

Loved This Class!

Introductory-Level Literature I

"The Birth of Modernism's Monstrosities," Spring 2012

Answer to Question #8 Overall assessment of instructor: 95% Excellent

Assessment & Testing - Florida State University - Report Created: 09/28/2013 - Semester/Year: Spring/2012

Student Perception of Teaching II

Instructor: Christopher Higgs
Department: English
Course: LIT2010 (INTRO TO FICTION) Section#: 02 Ref#: 09302
Evaluation Format: Paper *Course Delivery Format: Classroom-based*
Forms Ordered: 33 Responses: 21 (64%)

Response Scale			Response Scale		
SA = Strongly Agree	= 1		E = Excellent	= 1	
A = Agree	= 2		VG = Very Good	= 2	
N = Neutral	= 3		G = Good	= 3	
D = Disagree	= 4		F = Fair	= 4	
SD = Strongly Disagree	= 5		P = Poor	= 5	

State University System Student Assessment of Instruction (SUSSAI)

	E	VG	G	F	P	(#)*	MEDIAN*	IQR*
1. Description of course objectives and assignments	17 81%	2 10%	2 10%	0 0%	0 0%	21	1	0
2. Communication of ideas and information	17 85%	3 15%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
3. Expression of expectations for performance in class	20 95%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	21	1	0
4. Availability to assist students in or out of class	19 95%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
5. Respect and concern for students	20 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
6. Stimulation of interest in the course	21 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	21	1	0
7. Facilitation of learning	20 95%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	21	1	0
8. Overall assessment of instructor	20 95%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	21	1	0

Department or Unit Questions

No feedback for this section.

1. What did you like about the course and/or instructor? Give examples.

Awesome guy. Had so much fun in this class. Great teacher. Refreshing to have a teacher relate to us and treat us as equals while at the same time challenging us to think differently and learn new things.

1. What did you like about the course and/or instructor? Give examples.

Loved loved loved this man! What a passionate teacher who truly shows that he appreciates and is interested in his students. Honestly, am so glad I took up this class.

3. Additional comments and suggestions.

Mr. Higgs was so unbelieveably open & supportive of my opinions & ideas encouraging me every step of the way as well as pushing me to accomplish such amazing analysis & papers I've never experienced before

1. What did you like about the course and/or instructor? Give examples.

Instructor is clearly passionate about the material and this translates incredibly well into class, I look forward to coming in every day to learn from him. Very approachable & makes content very relatable. One of those people you know is doing what they love / what they're meant to do. Deeply engaged teaching style & philosophy.

1. What did you like about the course and/or instructor? Give examples.

This was a class I always wanted to come to, the discussions we had were interesting and thought-provoking and I often would think about our discussions outside of class, the videos to start class were always entertaining and great starting points, available for outside help, I liked how the format of the class was not just a lecture, but the tangent-driven lectures were educational and interesting, I really liked the course

Introductory-Level Literature II

"Global Perspectives on the Contemporary Novel," Spring 2013

Answer to Question #8 Overall assessment of instructor: 94% Excellent

Assessment & Testing - Florida State University - Report Created: 09/28/2013 - Semester/Year: Spring/2013

Student Perception of Courses and Instructors

Instructor: Christopher Higgs
Department: English
Course: LIT2081 (CONTEMPORARY LIT) Section#: 01 Ref#: 02191
Evaluation Format: Paper *Course Delivery Format: Classroom-based*
Forms Ordered: 26 Responses: 19 (73%)

Response Scale		Response Scale	
SA = Strongly Agree	= 5	E = Excellent	= 5
A = Agree	= 4	=	= 4
N = Neutral	= 3	S = Satisfactory	= 3
D = Disagree	= 2	=	= 2
SD = Strongly Disagree	= 1	P = Poor	= 1

Instructor Statements

	SA	A	N	D	SD	(#)*	MEDIAN*	IQR*
6. The instructor provided clear expectations for the course.	16 84%	3 16%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	19	5	0
7. The instructor communicated effectively.	17 89%	2 11%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	19	5	0
8. The Instructor stimulated my interest in the subject matter.	16 84%	2 11%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	19	5	0
9. The instructor provided helpful feedback on my work.	15 79%	2 11%	2 11%	0 0%	0 0%	19	5	0
10. The instructor demonstrated respect for students.	18 95%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	19	5	0
11. The instructor demonstrated mastery of the subject matter.	17 94%	1 6%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	18	5	0

Summary Statements

	E 5	4	S 3	2	P 1	(#)*	MEDIAN*	IQR*
12. Overall course content rating	16 84%	3 16%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	19	5	0
13. Overall instructor rating	19 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	19	5	0

What did you like about the course and/or instructor? Please give examples.

x

This has been one of the most fascinating classes I have ever taken/expect to ever take. Honesty, ~~I do not~~ care the least bit about literature and this course gave me a whole new perspective. Higgs is one of, if not the smartest person I have encountered in my life. His vast knowledge on anything and EVERYTHING is impressive to say the least. His outlook on not only literature but life is eye opening. Not only more professors but people should be like him.

What did you like about the course and/or instructor? Please give examples.

This is the first course that I've taken at Florida State that actually taught the students how to excel in everyday life by using the subject provided.

What did you like about the course and/or instructor? Please give examples.

The challenge that the instructor presented. This course make me look at not only literature in a different way, but life in a different way. The process in which this occurred was definetly a challenge as it made me forego all processes, teachings, and dogmas from the past and made me look at new methods that I've never explored before.

What aspects of the course and/or the instructor's instructional methods should be improved? Please give examples.

I think for the first time I can honestly say that nothing should be changed. The class is perfect the way it is.

Please list additional comments and/or suggestions.

Loved the class. I find myself discussing the things I've learned here on a daily basis with my friends and family. Genuinely enjoyed the class and has changed the way I view things in the world.

What did you like about the course and/or instructor? Please give examples.

This was by far my favorite class I've ever taken. Every class was filled with new, exciting informatior that really helped shape how I think today. From the beginning of the semester, I have found myself approaching situations differently and I have definitely broadened my interests in books, music, and art. I love this class and I'm honestly going to miss it so much. I will never be the same, this class has changed me for the best.

What aspects of the course and/or the instructor's instructional methods should be improved? Please give examples.

NOTHING! :)

Please list additional comments and/or suggestions.

Thank you so much for being an amazing instructor. You have challenged me in ways no teacher has done before and I truly appreciate everything you've done this semester! Good luck with your baby boy... he's gonna be the smartest/strangest kid ever! :)

Advanced-Level Literature I

"Major Figures in American Literature:
The Experimental Tradition from Gertrude Stein to Ben Marcus," Summer 2010

Answer to Question #8 Overall assessment of instructor: 100% Excellent

Assessment & Testing - Florida State University - Report Created: 09/28/2013 - Semester/Year: Summer/2010

Student Perception of Teaching

Instructor: Christopher Higgs
Department: English
Course: AML3311 (MAJ FIGR'S IN AM LIT) Section#: 02 Ref#: 04260
Evaluation Format: Paper *Course Delivery Format: Classroom-based*
Forms Ordered: 37 Responses: 21 (57%)

Response Scale		Response Scale	
SA = Strongly Agree	= 1	E = Excellent	= 1
A = Agree	= 2	VG = Very Good	= 2
N = Neutral	= 3	G = Good	= 3
D = Disagree	= 4	F = Fair	= 4
SD = Strongly Disagree	= 5	P = Poor	= 5

Section D SUSSAI (State University System Student Assessment of Instruction)

	E	VG	G	F	P	(#)*	MEDIAN*	IQR*
1. Description of course objectives and assignments	15 88%	2 12%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	17	1	0
2. Communication of ideas and information	17 94%	1 6%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	18	1	0
3. Expression of expectations for performance in class	18 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	18	1	0
4. Availability to assist students in or out of class	17 94%	1 6%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	18	1	0
5. Respect and concern for students	17 94%	1 6%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	18	1	0
6. Stimulation of interest in the course	17 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	17	1	0
7. Facilitation of learning	17 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	17	1	0
8. Overall assessment of instructor	18 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	18	1	0

2. What did you like most about this instructor? What could be improved? Give examples.

I've suggested this instructor to friends who haven't even taken an english course since freshman year. Everything about this course helped me grow as an intellectual and I wouldn't be the same student, person, or thinker without it. I worked my bum off out of respect for an enthusiastic teacher – something I've never done before.

3. Additional comments and suggestions

3. Additional comments and suggestions.

When I am a successful attorney in a few years, I know it will be because of my way of not just seeing the glass half full or empty. After this course, I ask what color is the glass? What temperature is the water? Where the glass came from. I won't forget professor Higgs for opening my eyes to a new way of thinking.

SCANTRON EM-250508-2: 7

1. What did you like most about this course? What could be improved? Give examples.

I liked how Mr. Higgs used multiple media (music, movie clips, slideshows, literature) to explain the avant-garde. He was able to make this difficult material relatable and coherent, both within its historical context and in connection with the 21st century.

Advanced-Level Literature II

"American Modernism," Fall 2012

Answer to Question #8 Overall assessment of instructor: 89% Excellent

Assessment & Testing - Florida State University - Report Created: 09/28/2013 - Semester/Year: Fall/2012

Student Perception of Teaching II

Instructor: Christopher Higgs
Department: English
Course: AML3041 (AMER AUTHR SNCE 1875) Section#: 02 Ref#: 08063
Evaluation Format: Paper *Course Delivery Format: Classroom-based*
Forms Ordered: 33 Responses: 20 (61%)

Response Scale			Response Scale		
SA = Strongly Agree	= 1		E = Excellent	= 1	
A = Agree	= 2		VG = Very Good	= 2	
N = Neutral	= 3		G = Good	= 3	
D = Disagree	= 4		F = Fair	= 4	
SD = Strongly Disagree	= 5		P = Poor	= 5	

State University System Student Assessment of Instruction (SUSSAI)

	E	VG	G	F	P	(#)*	MEDIAN*	IQR*
1. Description of course objectives and assignments	16 80%	4 20%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
2. Communication of ideas and information	15 75%	4 20%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0.5
3. Expression of expectations for performance in class	16 80%	3 15%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
4. Availability to assist students in or out of class	19 95%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
5. Respect and concern for students	20 100%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
6. Stimulation of interest in the course	18 90%	2 10%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
7. Facilitation of learning	15 75%	4 20%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0.5
8. Overall assessment of instructor	17 89%	1 5%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	19	1	0

1. What did you like about the course and/or instructor? Give examples.

New, productive way of approaching text.

Uses a lot of different tools (visual, audio, verbal) to engage different types of learners

made a conscious effort to keep environment inclusive, gender neutral, and radical.

Thank you

1. What did you like about the course and/or instructor? Give examples.

I really appreciated the respect you show towards your students and profession
Fresh and exciting - both the assigned novels and instruction.
Creative and educationally stimulating class environment.
Kept class interesting.

1. What did you like about the course and/or instructor? Give examples.

I loved Chris's enthusiasm for the material. The book list was extremely diverse, and he made it interesting to make connections between them all. Chris was always great about letting us voice our opinions, and opening up the floor to let us bring our ideas to the table. The fact that we were able to explore the texts together as a group in our lecture class helped to make it interesting, and view these works from multiple vantage points.

1. What did you like about the course and/or instructor? Give examples.

I loved, like seriously loved, Higgs use of outside sources and culturally relevant references for the text. So many incredible outside sources I ~~da~~ had not been exposed to. Great book selection as well.

1. What did you like about the course and/or instructor? Give examples.

One of the best teachers I've ever had, not just in college but in my entire schooling time. Really changed my perception of literature, art, and many aspects of life.

Creative Writing

Nonfiction Workshop, Fall 2010

Answer to Question #8 Overall assessment of instructor: 95% Excellent

Assessment & Testing - Florida State University - Report Created: 09/28/2013 - Semester/Year: Fall/2010

Student Perception of Teaching

Instructor: Christopher Higgs
Department: English
Course: ENC3310 (ARTICL & ESSAY TECHQ) Section#: 03 Ref#: 06428
Evaluation Format: Paper *Course Delivery Format: Classroom-based*
Forms Ordered: 25 Responses: 20 (80%)

Response Scale			Response Scale		
SA =	Strongly Agree	= 1	E =	Excellent	= 1
A =	Agree	= 2	VG =	Very Good	= 2
N =	Neutral	= 3	G =	Good	= 3
D =	Disagree	= 4	F =	Fair	= 4
SD =	Strongly Disagree	= 5	P =	Poor	= 5

Section D SUSSAI (State University System Student Assessment of Instruction)

	E	VG	G	F	P	(#)*	MEDIAN*	IQR*
1. Description of course objectives and assignments	13 65%	5 25%	2 10%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	1
2. Communication of ideas and information	15 75%	3 15%	2 10%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0.5
3. Expression of expectations for performance in class	15 75%	4 20%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0.5
4. Availability to assist students in or out of class	16 80%	4 20%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
5. Respect and concern for students	16 80%	4 20%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
6. Stimulation of interest in the course	15 75%	5 25%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0.5
7. Facilitation of learning	17 85%	2 10%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0
8. Overall assessment of instructor	19 95%	1 5%	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	20	1	0

1. What did you like most about this course? What could be improved? Give examples.

I liked how this course challenged me to think about writing in a completely new way. It made me realize I enjoy writing lyric essays. I will take the lessons I learned with me and apply it to other classes. It was very helpful to sit in a circle and discuss the lyric essays we had to read.

1. What did you like most about this course? What could be improved? Give examples.

I loved this course because it helped open my eyes to a new branch of writing that I now hope to pursue. Along with teaching the conventional things, I learned so much about new things. This course greatly improved my writing.

2. What did you like most about this instructor? What could be improved? Give examples.

Prof Higgs is my favorite instructor out of every prof I've had so far in college. He is thorough, eccentric (in a great way), passionate, interesting and overall a great prof.

3. Additional comments and suggestions.

I'll miss having this class!

2. What did you like most about this instructor? What could be improved? Give examples.

He's enthusiastic and funny and incorporates real-life aspects into class (ex: the class on publishing) that go beyond his expectation as a teacher and are assets to this students.

2. What did you like most about this instructor? What could be improved? Give examples.

His enthusiasm. Very understanding, knowledgable and eager to shape us as writers & people. It's not about the academia or grade but what skills we're developing.

III. Comments from classroom observations

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY | The COLLEGE of ARTS & SCIENCES
Department of English

December 5, 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

I have had the pleasure of working with Chris Higgs as a mentor during his first semester of teaching in the Florida State University First Year Composition (FYC) Program. I observed his class on Monday, October 5, 2009 when the focus was on audience awareness.

Chris has shown himself to be a thoughtful and enthusiastic member of my group of newcomers to the program. His energy combined with the experiences he brings with him from his time teaching at other universities makes his classroom a lively learning environment.

Before class started, the students moved their desks into a circle. Chris began class by outlining what he would like to see the class accomplish in the 50 minutes of class time. After, Chris moved over to the projector and began showing the music video of Bob Dylan's "Subterranean Blues," and then, asked the students to analyze the video and its components. According to Chris, this is the way he begins most classes as a music video invites casual discussion and allows him to segue into the day's topic. After the video and discussion, Chris asked the class to get out their reading responses and look over what they'd written. For this particular class, Chris assigned Toby Fulwiler's piece, "The Role of Audiences." He then asked each student to talk about one thing they noticed or found helpful in the article. After everyone spoke, Chris opened up a general discussion. By having everyone speak initially, the class eagerly participated, offering answers to each of Chris' questions. Chris asked follow-up questions that pushed his students to make connections between each other's comments and the other readings the class had completed.

After discussion of the reading, Chris asked everyone to get out a sheet of paper on which to answer questions regarding a movie trailer for the movie *Body Double*. The first time he played the trailer without the sound on and asked his students 1) Who is the intended audience? 2) Why do you think that is the intended audience of the trailer? After the students watched the trailer, he asked a third question: What genre is this movie? Then, Chris showed the trailer again with the sound on and asked the students to answer the same questions. Chris engaged the students in a discussion about their answers to the questions, and pushed them to make connections between other activities the class had recently completed.

During the last ten minutes of class, the students wrote 2 letters describing their experiences in college thus far: one to their grandmothers and one to their best friends. He asked them to consider the differences between content and voice. Then, in class discussion Chris helped his students tie this activity to the previous activity of the class period. Chris closed class with a summary of a few points that he wanted the students to take away from the activities they had completed.

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I very much enjoyed observing Chris' class. I was most impressed by Chris' ability to engage his students in discussion. They volunteered answers to questions with enthusiasm, but no one student dominated the discussion.

Chris has been an active and engaged participant in my mentoring group. He has volunteered very helpful assignments and insights to our discussions, and his group mates respect his opinion and benefit from his insight. Working with Chris has been a pleasure, and I have learned from him this semester.

Sincerely,

Sarah Grieve
First Year Composition Mentor
Florida State University

May 1, 2010

Peer Mentoring Letter for Christopher Higgs

To Whom It May Concern:

During the spring semester of 2010 I had the pleasure of working with Chris Higgs as his first-year teaching assistant mentor. We met regularly in small groups and also communicated one-on-one as necessary. In groups we discussed some of the challenges involved in teaching freshman research writing, and exchanged with each other various ways to make the teaching of MLA citation guidelines more interesting and for making plagiarism less tempting. We also discussed ways of maximizing student participation, and strategies for balancing one's time and efforts between teaching, graduate work, and one's personal life. Chris was always attentive to the advice offered by others in his group and happy to share advice based on his own experiences. Throughout these fifteen weeks he's proved himself to be honest, intelligent, and creative.

On March 23, 2001 I had the opportunity to observe one of Chris's classes, and right away I was impressed by the easy and yet professional rapport he had with his students. Chris had the students organize their desks in a circle, and then began the class by giving the students a roadmap of what they'd cover during the class period. The class had recently finished a research paper, and Chris was eager to receive their feedback on the project, what they had liked/disliked, how they thought they had performed, etc. The class was very forthcoming with this feedback, and the discussion proved to be a kind of verbal process memo.

Next Chris moved on to what would be the class's next major assignment, a short research paper in which they would have to analyze the rhetorical strategies in an advertisement. Chris explained the assignment, fielded questions, and then proceeded to model the assignment by showing the class a Pepsi commercial from the early '90s. The class watched the video, freewrote responses, and then discussed the video in terms of ethos, pathos, logos, and audience. Throughout, the class was very participatory, and Chris did an excellent job leading the discussion, both by rephrasing the students' comments and by asking questions that led in interesting and pedagogically fruitful directions.

I enjoyed observing Chris's class as well as working with him throughout the semester. He's friendly and enthusiastic and truly cares about both his students and their writing. It was a pleasure to be his mentor, and I'm sure that his students were equally lucky to have him as their teacher.

Sincerely,

Josh McCall
First Year Composition Mentor
Department of English
Florida State University

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The road less traveled

Literature graduate student Chris Higgs at last finds his calling in research and teaching

By Eric Fisher

Photos courtesy of Chris Higgs

If you step into the right classroom at the right time in the Williams Building at Florida State University, you can enter a world unlike any you might have seen before. You might be greeted by a video of a song by pop star Nicki Manaj or by a discussion of surrealist literature. You might find yourself in a room where a reference to Barney Stinson of the TV comedy *How I Met Your Mother* might find its way into the same sentence as an analysis of the work of postmodern author Clarence Major.

If you step into the right classroom, you might enter the world of Chris Higgs.

Higgs's enthusiasm and passion are apparent in the classes he teaches. His early infatuation with acting shines through as he holds students in his palm, sharing stories of his time in the Peace Corps or film school, or relating an anecdote of pop culture to the material being covered that day, all delivered with a candor and sense of humor as distinctive as it is engaging.

Students engage willingly and actively in class discussions, despite how flummoxed some of them may be by experimental literature. Higgs, a literature Ph.D. student, specializes in studying and teaching material that is anything but usual and does so in a style that is similarly unconventional. In Higgs's classes, new perspectives and concepts are continuously and fearlessly explored, and it is all tied together by the man in the center of the storm of intellect and curiosity.

Anyone watching Higgs lead his class might think teaching was his first calling. However, the path to becoming the instructor, student, and writer he is today was one that took him through a host of twists, turns, and travels.

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"In Chris's class, I desired to learn not to receive a letter grade, but was motivated by the material and the desire to learn and better understand myself and the world around me."

— Andrew Spaulding
a student in Higgs's Fall 2011 class

Higgs served in the Peace Corps, and spent time during the summer of 2003 in the West African Arab republic of Mauritania.

Higgs from page 18

Music lights a fire in Higgs

Rewind to the early 1990s in Cheyenne, Wyo., where Higgs was a teenager with a strong passion for acting and film and an equally strong distaste for the world of literature and academics. That changed in a surprising way.

"I was going through kind of a rebellious phase at 15 or 16 years old and listening to music from my dad's records to do something odd, just listening to this old school music," Higgs says, chuckling at the memory. "And then I got into this Doors album he had, and I thought this Jim Morrison guy was really cool. When I researched him and realized how much he referred to literature, I thought, 'Jim Morrison is awesome and he likes reading, so maybe I've been looking at reading wrong.'"

From there, he made a list of works of literature that Morrison referred to in his music or had at his apartment at the time of his death and devoured it on his own during his high school years—"I still didn't read my school books," Higgs says.

Literature was not his only passion, however. In 2000, Higgs took steps toward his first dream—working on a movie set in Los Angeles. Inspired as a high school student by prominent American independent filmmakers of the era, including Quentin Tarantino and Kevin Smith, and following a few years at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas film school, he got his chance to move to Hollywood.

The first film he worked on was the 2001 comedy *Rat Race*, on which he served as a set production assistant, directing extras among other responsibilities.

After a while, fatigued by the rat race that was life in the film industry, Higgs decided it was time to pursue a new passion. Wanting to see more of the world, he set his sights on the Peace Corps.

In the summer of 2003, Higgs found himself serving in the West African Arab republic of Mauritania—far from his original choice for serving, the countryside of Peru. Higgs was surprised at the situation he was in: the outbreak of the Iraq War in 2003 led President Bush to redirect all Peace Corps volunteers to Arab republics. Thus, Higgs's vision of the beauty of Peru was replaced with the turbulent desert of Africa as political violence and unrest in the nation's capital greeted his group upon its arrival.

Higgs spent one summer in Mauritania but took the opportunity to leave when given the chance. He returned home, unsure of what was next. While seeking his master's degree in English at the University of Nebraska, Higgs found himself being drawn to a new form of literature with that same curiosity that Jim Morrison's appreciation for literature had sparked in him as a teen.

Higgs always had an interest in experimental writing, he says, and had been an amateur writer on his own, but he had never encountered writers who embraced that experimentation in an academic setting.

The work of prominent experimental authors, such as Ander Monson and Donald Barthelme, helped shape Higgs as both a writer and a student. It also inspired him to seek his master's in fine arts at Ohio State University, where he completed his studies in 2009.

From Ohio State to Florida State

Higgs and his wife, whom he met at OSU, then hoped to find a place where they would both be able to pursue their doctoral degrees, and they found it at FSU. The Chris Higgs who arrived in the English department was no longer the book-avoiding teenager and restless student.

"[Chris is] an intelligent, passionate, and enthusiastic student of modernism, 20th-century fiction, and the avant-garde, who was, as an experimental fiction writer himself, deeply interested in critical theory, the history of literature, and the practice of writing at the same time," says Associate Professor Andrew Epstein, a member of Higgs's supervisory committee.

In the classroom, Higgs is eager to guide his students through such difficult work.

"I have really admired his willingness to introduce undergraduates to writing that can often seem forbidding, obscure, and unsettling at first, but that can ultimately be very rewarding and eye-opening work," Epstein says.

"I'm not interested in talking about books everyone talks about," Higgs says, adding that he likes to get students out of their comfort zones.

Higgs acknowledges that a few students drop his course during the semester because of the unusual challenges presented to them. Yet, he believes it is the unorthodoxy in his classes that allows him to foster an environment in which students actively participate in discussions, despite frequently being in unfamiliar literary territory.

Higgs's own research as a Ph.D. student, with its focus on experimental and avant-garde literature throughout history, helps his students navigate the complexities of what he is teaching. Epstein describes Higgs as having a "voracious appetite for discovering as much as he can about a wide range of experimental forms in literature, art, and culture."

Higgs's main goal, and what he calls the most rewarding part of his work as a teacher, is getting students both to show a personal investment in wrestling with the material and the concepts covered and to display a true intellectual spark.

"My favorite thing about Chris as a teacher is his desire to develop his students as intellectuals," says Andrew Spaulding, a student in Higgs's Fall 2011 Postmodern Literature class. "He believes in what he's doing and is passionate about it. Because of this, students can't help but be inspired to try to learn and grow."

Higgs enjoys having the opportunity to simply change the way students think, if only a little bit, in hopes that the new perspective will travel with them out into the world, wherever that may be.

"In Chris's class, I desired to learn not to receive a letter grade," Spaulding says, "but was motivated by the material and the desire to learn and better understand myself and the world around me."

Despite being only 33 years old, Higgs's wealth of experiences makes it is easy to understand why he values expanding the perspectives of his students, not only in the classroom but also outside of it.

"I think it's kind of like dating," says Higgs. "If you don't go on dates with different people, it's hard to really find the right person, because it's hard to know what you do and don't like exactly. And having had those other experiences, I can really say that I do this because I like doing this, because I've done a bunch of other things that I didn't like as much."

Whether he is writing, teaching, or pursuing his own studies, Higgs—the former set production assistant turned Peace Corps volunteer turned Ph.D. candidate—tackles everything with a trademark infectious fervor that students and colleagues cannot help but notice and admire. And he does it all with a sense of ease and enjoyment befitting someone who has wandered far but finally found the place he belongs.

If you enter the right classroom in the Williams Building, you may find yourself in that place with Chris Higgs.

V. Awards for Pedagogical Excellence

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
The College of Arts & Sciences
Office of the Dean

January 24, 2011

Christopher Higgs
Department of English
Florida State University
Tallahassee, Florida

Dear Mr. Higgs,

I want to congratulate you for the strong evaluations you received last semester from your students and thank you for your commitment to your classroom teaching.

Each semester I receive data on student evaluation of teaching in the college as determined by question 8 on the SUSSAI regarding overall instructional effectiveness. While the members of the faculty of Arts & Sciences consistently perform well on these evaluations, some individuals stand out even among this strong group. In particular, you were rated as "excellent" on SUSSAI question 8 by at least 90% of the student evaluators. While there are many factors to examine in assessing the best instruction, this kind of response from the students speaks loudly about your effectiveness in their eyes and, accordingly, in mine. In these difficult times, it is doubly important to offer the best instruction we can to our students and you are one of the people showing the rest of us how to do that.

Sincerely,

Joseph Travis

Joseph Travis, Dean
College of Arts & Sciences

Cc: Ralph Berry, Ph.D., Chair, English

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

Department of English

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Phone (614) 292-6065
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December 11, 2006

Christopher Higgs
Department of English

Dear Chris:

Each quarter, The First-Year Writing Program recognizes exemplary teaching in any version of English 110, as indicated by student response in the discursive evaluations. When we find that students respond positively, substantially, and consistently to general or specific instructional practices for any one course or instructor, we recognize that excellence by placing an official commendation letter in that instructor's file. Congratulations--we find your Autumn 2006 student evaluations most worthy of such a commendation letter!

Your students were unanimous in their recognition of your effectiveness as a teacher, including the student who wrote, "He was always on time and prepared even though the class was at 7:30. He actually made me enjoy a subject that I used to hate." Another wrote simply, "I never knew I could write such beautiful papers."

We are honored to have you teaching with us in the FYWP, and we wish you the best in your future teaching.

Sincerely,

Wendy

Wendy Hesford, Associate Professor
Director, First-Year Writing Program

Cc: Clare Simmons, Graduate Studies Director, Department of English
Christopher Highley, Undergraduate Studies Director, Department of English
Eddie Singleton, Associate Director, FYWP

Certificate of Recognition for Contributions to Students

The Parents Association and
The Teaching Council
of the
University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Commend

Chris Higgs

A member of the University community who has made a significant difference in a student's life.

January 27, 2006
Date

Barbara J. Ferris
President, Parents Association

Jan W Kiy
Chair, Teaching Council

Harvey Perlman
Chancellor