

**Peer Teaching Evaluation**  
**University of British Columbia Okanagan**  
**Department of Creative Studies**

**Denise Kenney, 2011 W Term 2**

*Evaluators:* Nancy Holmes (Associate Professor, Creative Writing, Department of Creative Studies); Neil Cadger (Head, Department of Creative Studies, Associate Professor, Interdisciplinary Performance)

*Dates/ Classes of Evaluation:* VISA 371: *Documentary Production*, Friday, February 3, 12 noon – 1:30 PM; IGS 520D: *Interdisciplinary Workshop*, Thursday, February 9, 9:30 – 11:30 AM.

*Date of Report:* February 13, 2012

Denise provided Neil and Nancy with course outlines for each course. She also provided us with a clear and detailed outline of the topic and learning outcomes of each individual class we reviewed. VISA 371 was a lecture class in an otherwise primarily studio course; however, since this is the only film production class on campus, she needs to spend some time delivering basic ideas about theory and form; this class was part of that review and lecture component of the class. IGS 520D is a graduate studio course; the class reviewed was a studio class, hands on with body work and exercises, as well as a review of a group project. This variety provided us with the usual range of Denise's teaching assignments and provided a good balance of upper level and graduate classes to add to the first and second year classes that were assessed in 2009. The IGS 520 was a small studio class with four students; the VISA 371 course had 10 students in attendance.

**Observations:**

Organization: Classroom management was effective. Classes came to order, and late students did not unnecessarily interrupt the flow and timing of the class. In fact, in IGS 520, one student was nearly an hour late; Denise quickly rearranged the first 20 minutes of the class to allow the students to set up their project instead of having everyone waiting around for this student to show up. Time was attended to well. She followed her class schedule to the letter and had assessed accurately how long it would take her to go through the material.

Space and Equipment: Denise uses the space available appropriately for the most part. In the IGS class, she obviously knows the space well and uses it comfortably (FIN 144). The room was nicely divided into two usable spaces, one place where the students would present their project and one space where they did their warm up exercises. The students were obviously comfortable in the space. In VISA 371, the students were perhaps less comfortable. They were seated in a circle, which was good, but the chairs in the Green Room are uncomfortable. It was unclear why the Green Room is used as the teaching space for this course, except that it does provide a good atmosphere for "film". However, it is possible the space is not used as effectively as it could be; if Denise is not going to use a regular classroom for the lecture portion of this class, then she might want to take more advantage of the Green Room space in the lecture. For example, in this particular lecture, she spent some time talking about how the camera

would move for certain shots. Even though the class was in the Green Room and all the camera equipment was next door—she didn't use an actual camera to illustrate her points. She uses her body and mimed the actions, which were good! Why not use the real thing if it's just next door? It is possible that the media work study student responsible for the media lab space could be asked to set up equipment for her and be asked to take it down after the class. The students in this course might like an opportunity to look at the gear and be able to get up off those chairs. The Power Point presentations of video clips and lists of key points were clear, useful and effective.

*The Green Room is not the ideal space for this course. Its proximity to the Canwest Global Centre and the editing facilities is the reason for choosing to situate the course here. The room is, however, uncomfortable. There are also issues with it being properly maintained. Due to this, I may change locations in the future. It must be noted that it is difficult to book appropriate space for our classes. While having a camera present would make the example more concrete, the students had previously done a camera workshop with hands-on exercises. This lecture was essentially a review of this material for the purpose of generating a list of potential shots and establishing a language for the camera and for the medium. This point is well taken, however, and I will attempt to use the camera more concretely in the future, without it distracting from the task at hand.*

Communication and Body Language: Denise has an extremely clear and carrying voice. Her delivery was effective, clear and articulate, but she does have some distracting mannerisms at times. She is confident, interesting, and respectful. She makes classes lively by being very physical, gestures, jumping to her feet for emphasis and generally ensuring the level of energy in the class is high. The only suggestion that might be made is that she might be using some communication techniques that work well in Performance classes but that in this VISA class they might go over less well—for example, she might want to warn students she is going to use them to illustrate a point about placement and composition before she hauls them up.

Interaction with Students: Denise projects real interest in the work her students do. In the IGS 520 class, she talked with them, observed their work intently, and provided detailed and specific feedback. She paid the students the greatest compliment of taking what they did intensely seriously and really listening to them. She expects and receives engaged participation. She also allows them time to think and respond without always jumping in and filling in a silence. This silence was never uncomfortable. Everyone seemed to realize it was for thinking. During the project presentation in IGS 520, she was obviously observing and making notes while the students presented, but she never once intruded on the performance or did anything distracting. She was attentive but also indicated real pleasure in the work the students were doing which must be gratifying to them. In VISA 371, she always referred to the specific projects the students were embarking upon, paying real attention to their individual concerns. The students in this class seemed engaged and responded insightfully to questions about composition of shots. She checks in with the students frequently, asking if there are any questions, asking “Is everyone with me?” When a student made one suggestion about a possible scene in his movie, she praised the idea generously. At least half of the students were taking notes in class. The one student who was very late and interrupted an exercise in IGS 520D was acknowledged when he came in briefly but was not allowed to disrupt the class; she told him she would fill him in later about what they were doing.

Content: Denise knows her material extremely well. In the VISA 371 class she had no notes but her Power Point lists. She is obviously an expert and spoke thoroughly and well about the topic. She took

the difficult topic of point of view in documentary and provided very clear descriptions and examples. There were a very few times she used terms that might not have been clear to the class—“Lock it off” was one term that seemed to confuse some students and it was not explained. Also, “b-roll” was not explained in this class, though it might have been in a previous class. The VISA 371 was a very practical, information-heavy class but over and over she modeled how this information could be applied to the students’ own projects which made the information feel important and relevant. In the IGS 520 class, as is appropriate in a graduate class, she always provided the theory around the task the class was doing, linking the theory of performance’s first site being in the body with the task at hand. In the class exercise, “Crossing the Line,” she frequently underscored why they were doing this task, what the benefits were for the students’ own work and then after the exercise was over, both gave them a chance to explore the significance of what they’d done (she genuinely praised one student who made a “great choice” in this exercise) and pointed out key ideas the choices raised. Denise is extremely good at identifying strengths and weaknesses on the spot. Although there was no way Denise could have known how some of the exercises would have unfolded, she was incredibly astute at providing an in-depth and sophisticated critique. She noted that one exercise “shifted from figure to ground” which made everyone in the class, including the peer evaluators, understand what had happened. She also raised a really interesting point about how the exercise developed a latent but powerful set of unique rules—a fascinating window into how art functions. These were complex ideas appropriate to the graduate level.

Teaching Strategy: In IGS 520, there was a great deal of discussion and exchange as is appropriate in a graduate class. As noted above, her content included theory for each task at hand. She was open to a great deal of creative response and when one student ran to get a notebook to write some idea down, this seemed to be completely accepted. While the project was being presented in this class, she took notes and when the performance was over, her response was perfectly appropriate for a graduate class. She first asked them what their questions were and what they needed. Then she reminded the students of the Crossing the Line exercise they had just done and how it was a tool they could use to assess and develop their performance. And then she turned to her notes, which were primarily in the form of questions. In VISA 371, her approach was more appropriate for the undergraduate students learning a new vocabulary. She listed the types of shots, illustrating them with body language and miming, and then she turned on the film clips and showed them examples of the types of shots. Then she frequently asked them to consider what type of shot might be useful for their particular projects. This three-part structure was very clear and helpful.

Research: In VISA 371, Denise’s background in filmmaking was well-integrated into her teaching when she used examples from her own experience as a documentary filmmaker. The bibliography in the IGS 520D class is an excellent list of appropriate resources for graduate students. The students in the IGS class are clearly working on a project that is relevant to their own research and creative practice. In VISA 371, Denise has found an ideal forum for undergraduate students to explore their own research potential as they propose and carry out their own original ideas to create documentaries they will be able to use in their future CVs and portfolios.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion:**

Denise Kenney is an excellent teacher and we have no concerns about her performance in the classroom. She seems to be comfortable, able and approachable. She has many strengths which she clearly builds

on year after year. She is an excellent teacher. There are a very few recommendations included in the comments above. Here is a quick summary of them:

1. Consider using a work study student to set up the “lab” for the media class— cameras, rigs etc.
2. Remember the difference between Performance students and non-Performance students when pulling them up out of their seats to use as “examples”—the non-Performance students could be startled and uncomfortable—at least speak to them first.
3. At times, explain some terms that might be unfamiliar to the class (this is rare as she nearly always pitches the level just right.)
4. Consider consciously calming any physical gestures unless they relate directly to the material being taught.

We would like to commend Denise Kenney for her high quality teaching. She provides real service to her students and the program areas she supports, in this case VISA/ FILM and our graduate program.