

## **Observation Report for Syelle Graves**

### **English 331 – Fall 2011**

I observed the October 24 meeting of Syelle Graves's ENGL 331-51 class (The Structure of Modern English) and am pleased to be able to offer a very favorable report on the experience.

This session was devoted to phonology, and there were 21 students present.

This very efficient session began with Graves taking attendance before the class commenced (she added the names of a few latecomers afterward). This was essentially a lecture class, in which Graves used the smart classroom with dexterity, allowing her to convey much very challenging material in a relatively short time. To this observer the terrain of phones, phonemes, allophones, phonetic environments, "narrow" and "broad" phonetic transcription, alveolar flaps, nasalization, and complementary distributions is like a lunar landscape, and she was very good at reassuring the class that the material she was presenting could seem "really overwhelming" and occasionally "mind-bending." Consequently, she often tried to elicit positive response to her question, "Are you with me?" and also made clear that she would be going over the material again from a different perspective. She also reassuringly made clear what finer points in her presentation the students would *not* be responsible for on quizzes or exams.

Graves also frequently stopped to offer examples, encouraging participation by practicing phonetic descriptions. The last twenty minutes were devoted to more intensive practice in this mode, after handing out a "Flowchart for Discovering the Distribution of Sounds."

The syllabus reveals a very rigorous class: homework is due at virtually every class meeting.

And several remarks suggested that she is in close online contact with her students.

The velocity of the presentation was impressive, but handled the several queries interrupting it well, being emphatically generous with responses that signaled that a student was "getting it."

Graves is a very poised and articulate teacher. I was amazed to learn afterward that, in fact, she does not consider herself a phonologist by linguistic trade, since she gave the impression of being totally on top of the subject of this class.

All in all, an impressive performance.