

Dr Valerie Wee

Department of English Language and Literature



Dr Valerie Wee teaches within the English department's media/cultural studies track, where she chairs four modules each year: EN2113: *Reading Film and Cultural Texts* (enrolment: 80-90), EN2241: *Introduction to Film Studies* (enrolment: 45-55), EN3242: *History of Film* (enrolment: 30-40), and EN5252: *Movies, Spectatorship and Subjectivity* (enrolment: 10-20)

Dr Wee has conceptualized these modules as a related set in which students are exposed to increasingly challenging material, her goal being to place our students on par with graduates from any established North American film/media studies program and to provide a sound foundation for those wishing to pursue graduate work in this field.

The strengths of Dr Wee's teaching are many. As reflected both in the peer reviews and qualitative student feedback, Dr Wee has a deep passion for and mastery of her subject. She is very knowledgeable, at the same time able to transmit that knowledge clearly to the students, making complex concepts easy to grasp with her 'detailed and yet understandable explanations'. As also pointed out in her feedback, this is facilitated by the obvious rapport she has with the students, and also by the extreme clarity of her articulation and well-paced teaching; here, there is energy without rush, calm without stasis. She is engaging and her enthusiasm for the subject is contagious.

Dr Wee's teaching strategies reflect her belief that she and her students are collaborators in learning. Acting as guide and facilitator, she patiently and expertly draws out students' extant knowledge, using it as a foundation upon which to build a more nuanced understanding of film theory (EN5252) or the socio-cultural, political and economic roles played by different media texts in contemporary society (EN2241 and EN3242). The expectation that students will take responsibility for their learning results in increased student proactivity and interactivity; it was noted by the peer reviewers that in Dr Wee's lectures, students were comfortable about venturing questions and contributing, both during the break and in the spaces during the lecture which had been designed to facilitate student engagement with lecture material.

The desire to encourage autonomy in her students is especially evident in tutorials, where students are given the opportunity to pursue what they deem interesting, setting the agenda and leading discussion each week. In qualitative feedback, students consistently highlight how much they enjoy learning from one another, with Valerie tactfully guiding this process through timely feedback (in person and via email), thereby generating further group discussion, self-learning and critical reflection.

The theme of encouraging critical thinking, specifically, making connections across topics and pursuing an idea in depth (rather than just talking/writing superficially about it) appears consistently in both her undergraduate and graduate student feedback. Also worth highlighting is Dr Wee's pursuit of a key educational goal at NUS – developing articulate communicators.

Her peer reviewers praise Dr Wee's assignments not only for being creative and thought-provoking but also for their coherence – the second assignment builds on the first, reinforcing earlier skills, while extending the range and depth of what is being asked for. Students, similarly, mention how much they appreciate the way Dr Wee "paces the written assignments", setting aside class-time to discuss the requirements of each assignment and to provide hands-on experience of self- and peer-critique.

Here's how one of her students describes Dr Wee's impact: "I think a great teacher does not just impart knowledge but encourages questioning and critical appreciation of such knowledge. Dr Wee's seminars are conducted in the spirit of questioning and debate that made the classes not only enjoyable, which learning should be, but also encouraged me to want to read wider and explore deeper beyond what was covered in class. That is real education – the lesson that learning isn't about exams or grades but about a way of life."