

Jessy Irwin  
TenMarks Education  
400 Pacific Avenue, Suite 2W  
San Francisco, CA 94133

CASE

Attn: Professor of the Year Selection Committee  
1307 New York Avenue, NW, Suite 1000  
Washington DC 20005-4701

April 6, 2012

Dear Selection Committee,

I am writing, with pleasure, to nominate Professor John Boyer for the honor of Professor of the Year to be bestowed by your organization. I believe Professor Boyer to be a revolutionary force in the both the classroom and within higher education, and am honored to have had the opportunity to have been his student for two consecutive semesters at Virginia Tech.

As an exceptionally passionate and fearless educator, Professor Boyer is willing to do anything that will create life-changing learning opportunities for his students. When asked by his students to request an interview with Nobel Prize Winner Aung San Suu Kyi, Boyer had no idea that his class's YouTube request to "meet" the Burmese Resistance Leader would succeed. With the planning, help and connections of his 3,000 student class, however, he was able to secure the Skype interview of a lifetime with one of the most geographically restricted leaders in the world.

Where other professors have failed to find ways to engage and communicate with students, Professor Boyer is unafraid to use every tool available-- Twitter, Facebook, YouTube... he thrives on social media-- to reach his students and to welcome world leaders and experts to lecture his students. Though his courses fall under the Geography Department at Virginia Tech, his employment of project-based and inquiry-based learning results in students gaining unparalleled awareness of the world and learning vital critical thinking skills that will benefit students throughout their lives. For these reasons, his course is one of the most popular among Virginia Tech students-- and, with a waiting list of hundreds, one of the most difficult to get into if it wasn't assigned to a student during Course Request when scheduling classes for the next semester.

As a student at Virginia Tech, I survived numerous 500+ seat courses in pursuit of my bachelor's degree; in these impersonal courses, it is as rare for students to connect with one another as it is for them to connect with the professor. In the case of Professor Boyer's course, however, our class was more than just hundreds of students crammed into the lecture hall at once-- Professor Boyer's informal approach to lecturing and use of social media encouraged students to get to know one another and to function as a community where students are unafraid to reach out to one another and provide helpful study hints or explanations of the syllabus or whatever other topic was being addressed in class. He frequently communicates course news and events through his Facebook page and Twitter account, and he and assistant Katie Pritchard actively use the #wrvt hashtag for backchannel communication on numerous topics with current (and former!) students.

More than any other educator I've known, Professor Boyer is dedicated to making not only his course, but his course content as relevant and up-to-date as possible for his students. While many of my former professors walked into the lecture hall with lesson plans that have gone unchanged for years, Boyer works just as hard as his students do (if not harder!) throughout the year as he teaches his courses. He creates multiple video lectures on current events a week, constantly edits his textbook so that it accurately reflects world events, and regularly maintains his course website as an open educational resource accessible to educators (and curious parents) everywhere. While many of my professors were more interested in furthering their career through professional research than the quality of their instruction, Boyer works tirelessly to improve and enhance his course for his students. Alternately, he is tireless in sharing his methods and collaborating with other educators to show that even the most impossible of feats-- like teaching a class of 3,000 students at once-- are possible with a little planning.

In a time when higher education is undergoing fundamental change and when many question whether costly technology adoption makes a positive difference in education, Professor Boyer and his class of 3,000 provides are a concrete examples of technology's ability to positively impact—and disrupt—the traditional classroom (and lecture hall) for the better. His willingness and fearlessness in regards to experimenting with technology and speaking his mind encourage and inspire his students to pursue their dreams, to challenge themselves and the world around them, and to be open to new experiences and cultures. Through communication and community building, he has transformed a core curriculum fulfilling course to a life-changing , eye-opening experience for each student that crosses the threshold to his class.

While I am no longer one of Professor Boyer's students, I am proud to still be part of the community he has built and I am proud to call him a mentor, an inspiration, and a friend. Were it not for the knowledge I gained about social media in his course, technology that was in its infancy when I was his student, I would not have the life I have today. I have always dreamed of being part of something big, something that would change the world and the lives of people involved in it. At one time, I feared that the tragic events of April 16th, 2007 were it, that being affected by something that had gripped the nation would be my legacy as a Virginia Tech student. It wasn't until I took Professor Boyer's classes and became part of something bigger than myself, part of my class community, that I realized that my dream had come true. Because of the lessons I learned and the community I joined when signing up for Boyer's classes, I was part of something big, something historic, something that changed the lives of the people involved in it. Because of Professor Boyer's class, I found the courage to leave Virginia and move 3,000 miles in pursuit of my dream job, a career in social media and educational technology in the Silicon Valley.

With great appreciation, respect and pride, I nominate Professor John Boyer, for the honor of Professor of the Year. Thank you very much for your consideration, and if in the future the honors of "Best Professor Ever" or "Professor of a Lifetime" become available, please do not hesitate to contact me so that I may have the honor of nominating Professor Boyer again

Sincerely,

Jessica Irwin