



5 January 2011

Professional recommendation for Mr. John Boyer

To whom it may concern:

John has asked me to write an open letter of recommendation with respect to his service as an instructor in the Department of Geography at Virginia Tech. I'm unaccustomed to writing in this format, so am mainly making it up as I go, hoping that it serves present purposes.

I've known John since the time he was a student in our undergraduate program, then later when he was MS student. As he was completing his MS work, the department hired him as an instructor to assist mainly with our introductory undergraduate courses. I served as department head for the first several years of his service as an instructor for our department. Thus, I've known him as a student, as his department head, and more recently as a colleague. His MS thesis applied GIS technology to examine environmental dimensions of siting of Virginia's vineyards—the kind of analysis that is now accepted as the standard for such work, but which at the time formed an innovative approach to addressing such questions.

At the time the department hired John, our motivation was principally assure that we would be able to cover teaching of some of our introductory courses— although the faculty was confident in his ability to teach these courses well, I think it is fair to say that we had a rather modest vision for the future of that position. Since then, he has taught courses covering a substantial component of our undergraduate curriculum in Human Geography. From the beginning of his service as an instructor, it was clear that John was an unusually effective teacher instructor. He has distinctive ability to engage the interests of students, adopt new instructional techniques, and devise out-of-class activities that support the objectives of the course. As is clear from the details in his CV, his contributions have contributed to successes for the department and the university far beyond our initial ambitions.

Although he has taught many of our undergraduate courses, his principal achievement has been his innovative development of the department's World Regions course, which began in a conventional lecture format enrolling perhaps 30 to 50 students each semester, into a course that has been taught to as many as 2700 students each semester, using a large classrooms for lecture sections, and a variety of current learning technologies to engage students and to interact personally with students. The success of this course has been a significant not only for the department, but also for the university, as it forms one of the few avenues in the university's Curriculum for Liberal Education, which introduces students to global issues. As is evident from his CV, John has been unusually successful in introducing students to a critical perspective on contemporary global issues, but more significantly, in motivating students to take a continuing interest in international issues.

As department head, I found John's work with the World Regions course to be unusual in the sense that he has been able to engage the interests and enthusiasm of a broad spectrum of students, not with a subset of the full class as is often the case with other courses. His dossier

Invent the Future

shows that he has received the highest student assessments of teaching, unusual with respect to the high scores, the large number of students responding, and the continuity of such favorable student evaluations over the years.

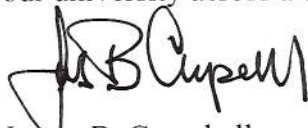
The university has awarded John several teaching awards, including the University's Sporn Award for Excellence in Teaching Introductory Subjects, notable for its focus upon the role of students in nominating candidates and selecting awardees. He has also received the Distinguished Teaching Achievement Award of the National Council for Geographic Education. Since then he has of course received additional awards. His work has been supported by our college dean, and by the university provost, who has mentioned to me that his work forms a model for effectiveness of instructors within the university community.

I have been impressed by John's ability apply current technology, including video, on-line chat, web pages, and other means, to reach and engage a wide range of students. As a department head I found myself to be frustrated to learn that often applications of new teach-learning technologies, contrary to early claims, increased rather than reduced, investments in faculty time. John has been effective in employing a wide range of instructional approaches and techniques, including authorship of textbooks, web delivery of course content, instructional activities outside scheduled class time, including film nights, exhibitions, podcasting, and weekly blogs on current news events. It is noteworthy that many of his optional instructional activities engage the participation of hundreds of students, signifying the value of these activities for students.

Finally, I emphasize that during his service as an instructor at Virginia Tech, John's achievements are not limited to the activities that I have highlighted above, but have encompass the full spectrum of instructional activities, with superior performance in many, if not all, dimensions of his work.

- Development of new courses;
- Promotion of the department's and colleges' study-abroad programs, including participation as a leader in at least five such programs, which collectively have taken over 120 students to over twelve foreign nations;
- Despite his appointment as instructor, with no formal duties outside undergraduate instruction, Mr. Boyer has presented his research at professional meeting, participated in funded research, and served on graduate committees;
- Although he has no formal advising assignment, John has been active in providing academic advice to students, mentoring GTAs, and serving as faculty advisor to student organizations. He takes pride in his accessibility to students, in the classroom, in his office, and through his participation in public events across the campus.

In summary, Mr. Boyer, though his multi-faceted service, has provided continuing service for our university across a diverse range of activities, executed with imagination and panache.



James B. Campbell
Professor