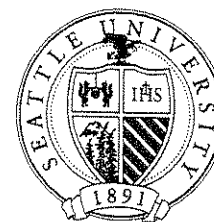


March 9, 2009

Dr. Mark Meyerhoff, Chair  
Department of Chemistry  
University of Michigan  
830 North University Avenue  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1055.



COLLEGE OF  
SCIENCE AND  
ENGINEERING

Dear Professor Meyerhoff:

I am honored to write a strong and enthusiastic letter to support the nomination of Professor Brian P. Coppola for the *Professor of the Year* national teaching award coordinated by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). He is the strongest candidate for this award that I know.

I have known Brian for over seventeen years, starting when he was my professor for introductory organic chemistry (Structure and Reactivity I and II; Chemistry 210 and 215) at the University of Michigan in 1991. Over the course of my undergraduate studies, I grew to know Brian somewhat better than many undergraduates since he served as my research director and undergraduate thesis advisor for two years. Throughout my education and into my independent academic career, I have been associated with four academic institutions (undergraduate at Univ. of Michigan, Ph.D. student at Univ. of California at Berkeley, postdoctoral associate at Univ. of California at San Francisco, and Assistant Professor at Seattle University) and I rank Brian in the top 1% of mentors and teachers whom I have had the pleasure of knowing; comparable only to Prof. Angy Stacey (U.C. Berkeley).

As a student of both chemistry and philosophy at Michigan, I was exposed to two very different models of teaching and scholarship. In chemistry, most courses were taught with the primary goal of subject mastery; these courses seemed to be designed specifically for the future practitioner in the field. This was in sharp contrast to my coursework in philosophy. In those classes one aim, of course, included a thorough understanding of the subject material; however, the faculty and the graduate student teaching assistants in my philosophy courses were engaged in a wholly different manner than most of my science mentors. Their larger aim was to facilitate students' ability to think critically, to reason soundly, and to correct and revise arguments in the face of contrary evidence. In short, the goal of many of these classes was to learn *to learn*. I tell this story because Brian's teaching exemplifies both of these pedagogical goals – *both content and process*.

The summer before I started graduate school at the University of California at Berkeley in 1994, I was quite nervous to be a student at a top institution for graduate study in chemistry.

**DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY**

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While I quickly discovered that I had been very well prepared by all the chemistry faculty at Michigan, it was clear that I had been especially well prepared by Brian's organic chemistry classes. His ability to help me view the world through the eyes of an organic chemist was astounding. Even today as an Assistant Professor of Chemistry at Seattle University, I often find myself explaining chemical concepts in ways that I remember him explaining them to me. Perhaps more importantly, the lessons I learned in Brian's classes (and research laboratory) are about learning and teaching. Even more than in my philosophy classes, Brian's classes emphasized students' personal and broad intellectual development. These messages have been woven into nearly every interaction I can remember having with him, whether in the lab, classroom, hallway or over e-mail; and it is this that distinguishes him from most all the other faculty I know.

Brian and I have remained in close contact over the past 17 years, and we have had countless conversations, thoughtful debates and brainstorming sessions over his (and my) latest ideas in curricular development, teaching innovations and classroom effectiveness. His is a very dynamic academic mind. In short, I find it difficult to find words strong enough to convey Brian's creativity and intellectual approach to questions of pedagogy.

I am currently in my fifth year as an Assistant Professor of Chemistry at Seattle University. I know many faculty members who are excited and gifted to train students to become thoughtful and meticulous practitioners; indeed, I am honored to have studied with several such mentors. As I reflect on my education with Brian, I consider how fortunate I am to have been trained to consider science both as a subject to engage actively and as a vehicle for learning. In fact, he is a large part of why I have decided to dedicate my life to undergraduate chemistry education. It is my sincere hope that I affect students in my professional life as profoundly as he has affected me. It is therefore with overwhelming and unhesitating enthusiasm that I support the nomination of Dr. Coppola for *CASE Professor of the Year*.

Sincerely,



Peter J. Alaimo  
Assistant Professor of Chemistry