



UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN  
DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY

Mark E. Meyerhoff, Chair  
Philip J. Elving Professor

March 10, 2009

U.S. Professors of the Year Program / CASE  
1307 New York Avenue, NW/ Suite 1000  
Washington, DC 20005-4701

**Re: Nomination of Dr. Brian Coppola for CASE Professor of the Year**

Dear Colleagues:

On behalf of the entire Chemistry Department at the University of Michigan, I write to nominate **Dr. Brian P. Coppola** for the CASE Professor of the Year award. As detailed below, I believe that the selection committee will be hard pressed to find another candidate whose vast and innovative contributions in chemical education as well as actual impact as a teacher within the classroom, rival that of Dr. Coppola. To further support this nomination, I am enclosing supporting letters from former students, Mr. Peter S. Hasiakos, Jr., Dr. Peter J. Alaimo as well as colleagues Professors Bassam Shakhashiri (Wisconsin), Craig Nelson (Indiana University), and Joseph Krajcik (Michigan).

Brian Coppola embodies the standards expected for a winner of the prestigious CASE Award. I won't detail what is obvious from his résumé: his rise from untenured lecturer at a major research university to chaired professor; his numerous grants; his scholarly publications in refereed journals; his national and international collaborations across disciplinary boundaries; his external awards, including the American Chemical Society's prestigious James Flack Norris Award for Outstanding Teaching of Chemistry, the Michigan CASE Professorship of the Year, designation as a Carnegie Scholar, election as a AAAS Fellow in *Chemistry* (not Education); and numerous university-wide teaching awards. Dr. Coppola is internationally known for the undergraduate-level Structured Study Groups (SSG), which extend the well-known guided-inquiry notion; and the graduate-level Chemical Sciences at the Interface of Education (CSIE) program, in which graduate students and post-doctoral associates design instructional materials and research educational topics along with their work in traditional laboratory chemistry. Most recently, he co-founded and was appointed co-Director of the Instructional Development & Education Assessment (IDEA) Institute, which uniquely brings together faculty and students in science, mathematics and education from across the university to design, implement and assess new teaching methods and materials for advancing science and mathematics learning.

Dr. Coppola's reputation for his accomplishments in undergraduate education crosses national boundaries. Several years ago he initiated the Chemistry Department's exchange program with Peking University, which brings Chinese undergraduates to our department for summer research participation, and *vice versa*. Most recently, he led a delegation of U.S. professors invited to that university to review its undergraduate chemistry curriculum. The chemistry department there takes its inspiration from what Dr. Coppola has accomplished here, exemplifying his impact far beyond our institutional boundaries.

Dr. Coppola is not a lone wolf! His extraordinary analytical skills, his passion for the educational enterprise and for the welfare of students *and faculty*, his energy and, perhaps most importantly, his innovativeness and accomplishments, have convinced his faculty colleagues how important their own engagement in education is to the mission of our program.

What better way to document his effectiveness as a professor than to listen to his students themselves. I wish I could attach the > 2-dozen astonishingly adulatory letters we have received over the years from current and former undergraduates who supported Dr. Coppola for various teaching awards. Expressions such as "life-long mentor," "changed/touched my life," "single most-important influence," "motivating," "inspire," permeate throughout each of the letters. A few examples follow for these letters include:

A current graduate student elsewhere: "Without the time and effort Dr. Coppola invested in developing my scientific curiosity, I would have vastly different career aspirations...it is difficult to effectively communicate how much I appreciate all his efforts on my behalf. I am, and will continue to be, a better scientist because of him."

One who reported that a chemistry professor who advised him to take Brian's course because: "Even if you were to sleep through class you would still learn more than going to a different section." Try as I might, Dr. Coppola's energy made it difficult to sleep through his lessons."

A current faculty member at a doctoral university: "Since I have known him, Brian has been my teacher, mentor, and friend through my undergraduate, graduate, and professional life. He recognized a talent in me for teaching, even before I did. He has always provided opportunities and guidance for me to develop my individual abilities. Importantly, Brian has never imposed his opinions on me, but rather he has always helped me to independently recognize, evaluate, and pursue potential opportunities."

An assistant professor at a liberal-arts college: "Brian emphasized the personal and broad intellectual development of his students. These messages [about learning and teaching] have been present in 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 all the other chemistry faculty I know...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."

A postdoctoral researcher at Cal Tech: "Brian's passion for teaching, and learning has continually fueled my development as a teacher and a learner. His role in my academic career began before my first day as an undergraduate, and has continued through today. His passion, intellect, and insight have been beacons for me along the way. Brian's pedagogy on teaching and learning is the bedrock upon which all of my chemical knowledge is based. This foundation has afforded me splendid results thus far, and I cannot see how I would be where or who I am without it."

A chemist in industry, who feared organic chemistry: "Instead, he transformed my goal of "surviving" into "thriving" and made the science the focus of my undergraduate and graduate education. He helps students recognize, by example, that the study of chemistry can be used as a metaphor for all areas of life, and as an arena in which to develop and sharpen skills with unlimited application."

Finally, from a current graduate postdoctoral researcher at Yale, whose comments capture the essence of Dr. Coppola's influence: "In the years since I left Ann Arbor,...Dr. Coppola continued to provide guidance and support (to me), as well as warnings, through thick and thin. As my views of academia (and the world beyond) expanded, we had many exchanges about chemistry education, ethics in academia, the philosophy of science, existentialism, Robert Oppenheimer, and art. ...As I continue to work toward a position in academia, I understand it is a privilege based on merit, but I also seek it as a post of public service. ...I shall give proper effort to become the best scientist and/or the best science teacher I can be. I also hope my career choices are agreeable to Dr. Coppola, because he is one of the true mentors who instilled in me the fundamental value of education, in the big picture."

Nothing more needs to be said—after all, students' lives are what this job of professor is all about! Dr. Coppola's incredible impact on his students, coupled with his scholarship and innovation in chemical education, make a compelling case for him to receive the CASE Professor of the Year Award. I look forward to his selection!

Sincerely,



Mark E. Meyerhoff, Acting Chair  
Philip J. Elving Professor of Chemistry