

April 2, 2009

Dear Members of the U. S. Professor of the Year Selection Committee:

We, the members of the Department of Psychology at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, would like to nominate Professor **Richard L. Miller** for the U. S. Professor of the Year Award. Dr. Miller is a scholar-teacher whose professional example inspires students and colleagues in all areas of academic life. His endeavors in the area of teaching have earned him numerous teaching awards including the Teaching Excellence Award from Division 2 of the American Psychological Association and the University of Nebraska's system-wide Outstanding Teaching and Instructional Creativity Award (OTICA). His leadership helped the department to earn the University's system-wide Departmental Teaching Award (UDTA). The accomplishments that led to these awards include his own teaching and its effect on students, as well as his effect on teaching within the Department of Psychology.

Dr. Miller's own teaching and effect on students. As the many letters written by students to support his nomination for the OTICA award emphasized, Dr. Miller's effect on students tends to be one of galvanization. That is, he is able to motivate them to reach heights that they did not think they could achieve. He does this in several ways. His presentation of material is both animated and rich in content. Not only does he keep the students focused and attentive through his engaging style; he also underscores the importance of the points through real-world anecdotes and observations. Dr. Miller is masterful at integrating a lighthearted style with consistent, direct and purposeful exposure to the "nuts and bolts" of the material. Students are engaged in the critical analysis and reasoning that accompanies psychological research. The student letters point to Dr. Miller's caring, his interactive style, his ready availability and willingness to devote long hours to assisting students (especially those engaged in research activities), his ability to engage their critical thinking and reasoning skills, and his love of the discipline that is contagious. His students have gone on to be successful in graduate programs such as the University of Kansas, TCU, Tulane, Tennessee, Florida, Texas Tech and Cornell University. It is noteworthy that these students keep in touch and report that their experiences as UNK undergraduates have prepared them well for graduate school and professional life.

Dr. Miller actively engages students in scholarly work. He has mentored student research that has resulted in publication both independently and collaboratively as well as presentations at annual conferences. Dr. Jerry Suls, Professor of Psychology at the University of Iowa, writes of a time in the early 70's when he and Dr. Miller were at Georgetown University. "It is also no surprise to me that he has found ways to wed teaching and research at UNK. At Georgetown, Rick worked very hard to make students not just knowledge consumers, but knowledge producers. I continually marveled at how he was able to inspire the design and conduct of interesting, elegant, and even important empirical projects from undergraduates. I don't think Rick does this to produce legions of researchers, but because he knows that this is one way to engage students, to make them good critics, and to have them appreciate the scientific enterprise, even if they choose not to pursue it. All of this contributes to an excellent education."

Since coming to UNK in 1990, Rick has mentored 186 empirical research projects conducted by undergraduate students that were presented at state or regional conferences. At the Great Plains conference, student presentations are evaluated by faculty judges and awards are given for the best papers. His students have an outstanding record of receiving these awards. His commitment to working with undergraduates in conducting research is evident in the 17 grants his students have obtained, and their 27 journal publications for which the student is the sole author. Also worthy of note are the 20 recent publications and 21 presentations done collaboratively with undergraduate students.

Dr. Miller's student evaluations for the last several years are indicative of how students *perceive* him. They are at the top of the departmental range for all questions. Students appreciate his enthusiasm about the subject material, even in his 8am classes; his ability to engage them in critical thinking; his preparation for class; his knowledge of the subject matter and his ability to provide real-life examples as well as insights gained from his own and his students research. Students generally rate the teaching in his courses between 4.50 and 4.90 on a 5-point scale, with a surprising number of classes receiving mostly "5" scores.

Dr. Miller's Effect on Department Teaching. Dr. Miller's example and effort have had a significant effect on other's teaching as well. He is always available to discuss teaching methods and problems. He has visited several professors' classes and provided constructive criticism on teaching style. Dr. Miller has led the department in its focus on teaching, so much so, that for four consecutive years, the Department received the UNK Departmental Teaching Award and in 1999 received the University of Nebraska's system-wide Departmental Teaching Award.

Dr. Miller initiated a complete revision of the curriculum soon after his arrival, and worked at developing an ongoing, comprehensive assessment program of student learning including writing skills, creation of a 50 page handbook for majors, allocation of activity scholarships to support student research, implementation of a psychology fair for high school students that involves 150 university undergraduates providing demonstrations for over 500 students taking psychology at the high school level, and implementation of rigorous criteria to evaluate teaching within the Department.

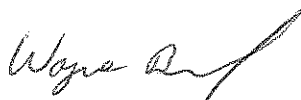
Since becoming Department Chair in 1990, Dr. Miller has actively encouraged collaborative faculty scholarship on teaching issues. There has been a significant increase in the scholarly productivity within the department. In fact, over the past decade, we have the highest number of refereed journal publications of any department within the College of Natural and Social Sciences. Also, to further promote undergraduate student research, he has encouraged faculty to seek external grant funding for research. During the past several years, funding has been received for a neuroscience lab, psychobiology lab, computer lab, developmental psychology lab, as well as a variety of research activities involving virtually all members of the department.


Dr. Miller has motivated the department to increase its participation in teaching conferences and workshops. He himself regularly presents papers at teaching conferences and during the past decade, other members of the faculty have presented 77 papers, in comparison to four papers presented at teaching conferences in the seven years before Rick was hired as Chair. It is now common that regional teaching conferences invite at least one of our faculty to be an invited speaker. *All members of the Department have been involved in teaching conferences in recent years.* Additionally, many faculty now encourage their lab and independent study students to participate in regional conventions. The eight members of the Department sponsor on the average about 35-40 undergraduate student papers a year. These are presented at the Great Plains Students' Psychology Convention, and the annual meetings of the Association for Psychological and Educational Research in Kansas, and the Nebraska Psychological Society as well as the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association and the National Conference of Undergraduate Research (NCUR). Again, this is a result of Rick's leading by example. His ability to excite faculty interest and abilities has increased the faculty's proficiency in teaching.

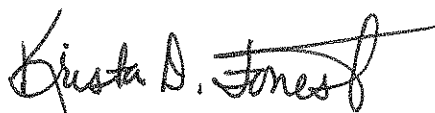
Faculty members in the Department have received funding for 11 grants related to the improvement of instruction and in the past three years alone have delivered 65 teaching presentations at conferences and engaged in research leading to the publication of 39 articles on teaching and 24 colloquia/workshops on teaching issues. Dr. Miller's enthusiasm is contagious, not only for students, but faculty as well.

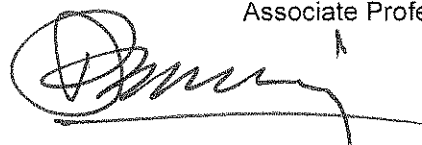
From the amount and quality of the information presented, we hope that it is evident that Richard L. Miller is both an exemplary academic citizen and an outstanding scholar-teacher. He is the kind of person who makes a difference. He has made a difference for us. Therefore, we, the members of the Department of Psychology, enthusiastically recommend that Rick Miller be selected as this year's recipient of the U. S. Professor of the Year Award.


Sincerely,

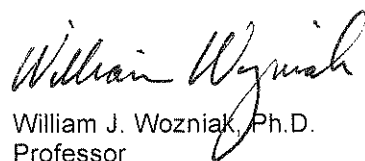

Wayne Briner, Ph.D.
Professor



Theresa Wadkins, Ph. D.
Associate Professor

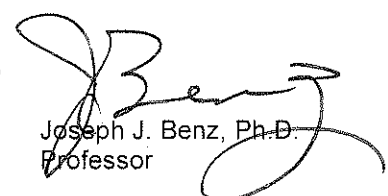

Krista D. Forrest, Ph.D.
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