



To:
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U.S. Professors of the Year Program Selection Committee,

This is a letter of strong support for my professor and mentor, Dr. Robert Thomas for the U.S. Professors of the Year Award. I am a junior at the University of Montana Western pursuing a Bachelor's of Arts in Environmental Sciences-Geology. After two years of attending Western, with a total of over 130 credit hours, and completing several classes with Dr. Thomas, I believe that he is the best Professor I have ever had. Because of his tremendous commitment to my learning, and my fellow students as well, I believe that he is by far the best choice for this prestigious award.

Dr. Thomas' dedication to Western and its students' is legendary on campus. It is best illustrated by the Experience One Program, which he spearheaded and helped to make happen. This unique system increased hands-on learning and helped students by focusing their studies on one course at a time. I was drawn to Western because of this system as a transferring student from the traditional semester system. This approach to learning took the school in a whole new direction, making it much more attractive to students who wanted to focus on their education. Professors are now able to set up their courses in ways that allow for extended trips and more hands on experience in the field. All of Dr. Thomas' courses are structured to include relevant field projects with a local twist applied to global issues. Accomplishing such projects has strengthened my confidence in my abilities and has increased my passion for my discipline and my graduate school ambitions.

My first course with Dr. Thomas in March 2008 was Depositional Environments, which included a weeklong learning excursion to Moab, UT and the neighboring National Parks. Being in the desert with the "Rock-God" is an incredible experience for an aspiring geologist. The arid, sedimentary landscape and Dr. Thomas within ear shot of my questions was like being within the pages of "The Magic School Bus"; a sensory overloading learning experience, which did, by the way, include licking rocks and extensive travel in a white school van!

Rocks are this man's roots. In this setting, I began to see how Dr. Thomas stood out above and beyond all of the other professors I have had. His pure enthusiasm, vast knowledge, and dynamic illustrations, complete with full body gestures, intensified my eagerness to be an environmental scientist. My personal commitment to being the best student I can possibly be is, in large part, due to the enthusiasm that Dr. Thomas brought to the field that week in the Utah desert.

Dr. Thomas has an ability to explain a topic in depth and yet simplify it with an interdisciplinary point of view that has become legendary on our campus. His “chill humor” and twangy, Guthrie-style campfire acoustics on the guitar illustrate Dr. Thomas’ approachable personality. He is so helpful and so well connected, that he is an important person to know on campus. He gets things done! He always has an open office door as well as an open mind for conversation. I have spent many hours discussing a wide variety of subjects with Dr. Thomas. He befriends all of his students and is aware of our concerns and passions. He genuinely cares about us as individuals and serves as a life mentor as well as an academic mentor.

Dr. Thomas is a great educator. He has already won countless awards in the hearts and minds of Western students, including mine. He is genuine. Students recognize this and go to him in droves for help, guidance and a friendly ear. He helps us find our drive and passion for education. I am in awe of Dr. Thomas, and he is my role model. Interestingly, I have noticed positive changes in myself that I can directly relate to knowing Dr. Thomas. He is a good person who has profoundly positive impacts on all who know him.

It has been a rewarding experience to have Dr. Thomas’ guidance throughout my undergraduate education. He has earned a staggering amount of respect from all of his students and I feel that I am writing on behalf of all of his students to express the “earthquaking” support he has from all of us. We sincerely hope he receives this award.

Sincerely,

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