



April 25, 2007

Dr. Dorothy Zinsmeister  
Senior Associate for Academic Affairs  
Board of Regents of the University of Georgia  
270 Washington Street, SW  
Atlanta, Georgia 30334

**RE: Nomination of Dr. Kirk Bowman for the FY 2007 Regents' Teaching Excellence Award**

Dear Dr. Zinsmeister:

Dr. Kirk Bowman is, quite simply, an amazing scholar and teacher. His doctorate is in the field of Comparative Politics, and he has made "comparing" the cornerstone of his professional life and of his teaching philosophy.

Striving to make the comparisons he teaches palpable to his students, Dr. Bowman brings the world into the classroom and he takes the classroom into the world. Since his first year at Georgia Tech in 1998-1999, he has been teaching students in the plazas of Havana, Cuba, the soccer stadiums of Buenos Aires, Argentina, the rain forest of Costa Rica, and the favelas of Sao Paulo, Brazil. He has led ten extensive study abroad programs in eight years.

When teaching on the Georgia Tech campus, Dr. Bowman facilitates a diverse array of courses (general education core courses, undergraduate elective offerings, graduate seminars) for a variety of student populations (undergraduates and graduate students, majors and non-majors). Whether these classes contain 200 students or 20, Kirk brings the sounds, smells, and wonders of the world onto the campus. In Latin American politics, for instance, he has the class examine the relationship between the tango and the politics in Argentina, and between the Bossa Nova and protest in Brazil. He also incorporates the many film festivals, food festivals, cultural events, and lectures that occur in Atlanta into his courses. His goal is to use multiple methods to engage the multiple senses of his students, thus helping them create connections and deep understanding. When meeting with students outside of class, Dr. Bowman conducts his office hours in the campus coffee shop. Whether discussing their term papers or class concepts, Dr. Bowman wants his students to feel that comparison and scholarship are exciting and rewarding and that professors are accessible.

Kirk Bowman says that his teaching maxim comes from the German comparativist and sociologist, Max Weber. Weber stated that "The primary task of a useful teacher is to teach his students to recognize inconvenient facts." Social science teachers should never attempt to shape the personal beliefs of students, but are required to teach and challenge students to critically evaluate the views and opinions that they have and to challenge conventional wisdom. So he constantly challenges his students to think about power and the creation of norms and opinions.

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Through this process, he helps his students become life-long learners, full citizens of their countries, and empathetic with those with whom they disagree.

Jody Robert Shaw, a student who studied with Kirk Bowman at both Georgia Tech and abroad, credits him with being “the most gifted educator” that he encountered in his university studies. According to Jody, Dr. Bowman has an “uncanny ability to convey his own passion for knowledge and create an environment that allows each student to find his own interest in the material.” And Kirk Bowman’s students do get inspired. James Cook, an electrical engineering student who wrote us in support of this nomination, says that what distinguishes Dr. Bowman from the typical professor is that “he lives and breathes what he teaches.” Indeed, James Cook says that he was so influenced by Kirk Bowman’s teaching that he changed fields upon receiving his engineering degree; he is currently in the Class of 2008 at Cornell’s Johnson Graduate School of Management.

Students notice Kirk Bowman’s impact on them—and so do the people who give awards to extraordinary students. Two of the three students from Georgia Tech who have won the Rhodes Scholarship have been students of Kirk Bowman. For example, Jeremy Farris, who is at Oxford on the Rhodes Scholarship this year, participated in Bowman’s Business and Politics in Argentina and Brazil Study Abroad Program in 2001; Jeremy used this course as a launching point for producing a documentary on indigenous peoples in Argentina, conducting research on democratization in Cuba, and working on reforestation issues in Guatemala. He credits Bowman with “providing not only the catalyst but also the substance for much of my undergraduate education.” Jeremy notes that as he writes from his residence at Oxford University, he’s aware that he is interacting on a daily basis with some of the best students from the United States—and he realizes what an outstanding teacher Kirk Bowman is. “I can honestly and unequivocally state that I have not once had a conversation with my colleagues regarding past professors in which I was led to believe that they had a more committed, selfless, and inspiring professor than Kirk.”

Kirk Bowman’s influence with students extends beyond his own classroom. Linda Brady, an administrator (she was the School Chair when Kirk was hired, and is now the Senior Vice President and Provost at the University of Oregon) who supports Kirk’s nomination for this award, described for us his impact on campus. Kirk has established three innovative, interdisciplinary study abroad programs that have broadened the horizons of thousands of students across a number of disciplines and programs. Most recently, Kirk Bowman extended this impact by founding Georgia Tech’s International House, a living-learning community of 40 students. Half of the participants are from the United States, and half are from abroad. International House activities include music, food, lectures, culture, books, and other sources to teach empathy and citizenship. Once again Kirk Bowman has created a co-curricular learning environment that promotes international understanding and cross-cultural awareness.

As an outstanding scholar, Kirk Bowman’s research—just as his teaching—crosses disciplinary boundaries. He draws from the disciplines of political science, history and economics. His book on militarization, democracy and development in Latin America has been well received and his

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current book project, which focuses on the political economy of tourism promotion in Central and Latin America, is already drawing attention. Students remark on his willingness to co-write articles and conduct research with them, and colleagues attest to his collaborative skills. Kirk Bowman, who is dedicated to making his knowledge accessible, applicable, and exciting to both students and professionals, clearly knows how to integrate scholarship and teaching.

Kirk Bowman's colleagues cite him as an extraordinary individual "who provides guidance and inspiration to his students." He is an "enthusiastic, provocative teacher who motivates students to think about the central issues and perplexing questions." Students agree: their letters to us highlight how Dr. Bowman "provides challenge and support," "ensures a proper balance of the serious anecdote with the silly," and teaches them "how to learn continuously." His college dean confirms that "his numerous teaching awards, student surveys and peer evaluations all attest to his virtuosity in the classroom and as a student mentor." In summary, I believe that Dr. Kirk Bowman is an outstanding candidate for the Board of Regents' Teaching Excellence Award. I highly recommend him to you.

Sincerely,



Gary B. Schuster

Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs

cc: G. Wayne Clough  
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