

DATE: March 1, 1994

TO: Nomination Committee
College of Human Ecology
New Teaching Excellence Award

FROM: Students of SW3201

RE: Letter of nomination for Allister Butler

This letter is presented to nominate Allister Butler for the College of Human Ecology New Teaching Excellence Award. Mr. Butler, a native of Port Elizabeth, South Africa, has been in the United States since 1988. He earned his Masters degree in Social Work from the University of Iowa. In 1991 Mr. Butler enrolled in the University of Minnesota Social Work Ph.D. program and he has actively educated students since his arrival. He has assisted Linca Jones teaching SW8901(Research Methods) and he has taught SW8902 (Program Evaluation) with Dave Hollister. As a primary instructor Mr. Butler taught SW3202 (Interventions in Community and Social Policy) in the winter and the spring of 1993. He taught SW8400 (Social Work Methods) in the fall of 1993 and he taught SW3201 (Intervention with Individuals and Groups) this winter until he returned to South Africa for his mother's funeral.

Allister Butler is a man whose passion for teaching exceeds that of any instructor on this campus. Some people are natural educators, and Allister's gift brings out the excitement and the fervor to learn in his students. Allister's outstanding ability coupled with innovative teaching methods mobilize students to excel.

Allister thrives on creative teaching methods to facilitate education. Rarely is class time filled with straight lecture. He may use music, poetry, a story or an article to make his point. Videos, guest speakers, student presentations, discussions, or group exercises are options he chooses from as well. Role-playing exercises are frequent and writing assignments are personal and integrative. The incorporation and interplay of the multitude of resources helps to guide the development of critical thinking skills in students. For example, Allister brings recordings and lyrics into the classroom. The initial focus on the music is independent of the lyrics. The lyrics are discussed as an exercise and the components integrated and applied to the topic. This approach is far reaching for many students and encourages them to analyze concepts and themes in a new light. He has done the same with poetry; We explicate the poem and then apply it to the topic or theme of the day. When we do role-play exercises Allister is not satisfied with an explanation of how a student would address a scenario. The students are supported and encouraged to experience their presence in that scenario and express what actually comes to mind. The class, as a group, follows through and continues to play out every possible response until we have exposed them all. It is a communication exercise that facilitates critical thinking and fosters the ongoing mutual relationship that empowers both the instructor and the students.

Allister has made a point of investing his whole "Self" into his blueprint for teaching excellence. He should teach a course on teacher leadership because his method and his model is successful. Allister's success begins with his rapport with the

students. His charisma brightens the classroom. His students call him by his first name. His voice is always encouraging, supportive, honest, and real. Allister relates to his students on their level as an educational partner or team player. He commands their respect because he treats his students as he would like to be treated himself. He emulates what he wants his students to know. He challenges them constantly when he is with them while offering support and guidance.

The planning that goes into addressing students' diverse learning styles includes a daily guide handed out before class starts. The guide always includes an outline of the daily lecture topic, an interactive or participatory exercise, and an evaluation form to ensure class feedback. There are students that are more comfortable with a straight lecture style and they receive a wealth of information from concise, time limited lectures. The students who learn better through interactive means benefit from the activities that supplement the printed and written material. Communication and interaction in pairs, small groups, and in the full classroom is strongly encouraged.

Critical thinking is an integral part of Allister's classes. Most students find it refreshing because the skill development is naturally encouraged, not forced. When we lift the words and the concepts from the page and bring them to real life we are encouraged to use critical thinking skills. In Allister's classes this is a routine.

As Allister's blueprint for successful teaching begins to look like a structure, the growth in his students shows as well, both intellectually and in terms of personal development. There is a competence of the specific subject matter. Many students notice a marked improvement in their critical thinking skills including decision-making, problem-solving, and analytical skills. The catalyst to all of this is the students are engaged! They are awake, interested, and motivated to learn. The energy that Allister shares with his students comes from deep within himself, perhaps his heritage, perhaps the cultural experience he has had, perhaps his life experience. It has shaped him and he is shaping us. The students are empowered. When students are excited about their education and they feel empowered then they feel like they can make a difference.

Allister uses his strength as a role model to further encourage the students' development of certain values such as team responsibility because we were taught that a group can often accomplish more than an individual. We also have learned that our social responsibility is to take care of those less fortunate than ourselves. And Allister has encouraged civic responsibility as well.

Allister is an excellent communicator with a diverse audience of students. He creates a classroom environment which is extremely conducive to effective communication among class members. This skill is a complex interplay of various

factors including his international and multicultural scholastic focus, his unconditional positive regard for all of his students, and his personal honesty and integrity. Communication is constantly encouraged through engaging classroom activities. There are students who never spoke who now contribute to discussions regularly, with confidence. They attribute their self-assurance to positive reinforcement and encouragement. Allister acts as a role model, a mediator, and a clarifier. Attention is given to verbal and nonverbal skills through classroom experiences. Students are openly encouraged to ask questions. Allister seeks the answers from the students rather than supplying them all of the time.

He also excels in using reflection. This method gives a "reality check" and guards against reinforcing inaccurate perceptions or biases. Reflection also encourages problem-solving skills. He facilitates on-going education by relating a specific topic or theme to a broader family, socioeconomic, cross-cultural or developing issue. Reflection also helps students clarify their values, thoughts and feelings, especially regarding new situations and material. Reflection acts as one of the best sources of material integration and Allister uses it daily for that purpose. And the part of reflection that Allister enjoys probably the most is that it builds group cohesiveness and community among the participants. Again it comes back to his empowering his students to make a difference by teaching them and learning from them.

Allister has taught his students a great deal beyond the black and white of a textbook. He has many students with varying disabilities and challenges throughout the quarters. Being a challenged student on this campus can be a dreadful experience. Allister sees no difference. "What do you need?.. "You've got it. No worries." He arranges for readers in class, proctored tests, and verbal exams instead of written for those who need them. He gladly provides clarification of notes or questions on the material. For challenged students who are enjoying the learning experience, it is a true pleasure!

Allister's origins in South Africa play an important impetus in our development of a social and cultural sensitivity. He brings an awareness of global issues and the issues of the "isms" to our classroom that is welcomed and embraced because of the genuine role model that he is to all of us. Discussion of all issues and questions are welcome and encouraged. Students find the conversations insightful because the experiences are personal.

There are many students who believe Mr. Butler's classes are the best educational experience that they have had at this University. Others have gone so far as

to say that he should be granted a permanent teaching position at the completion of his Ph.D. program. Everybody walks out of his classroom on the last day recommending him to someone else. We all feel that Allister Butler is a rare example of teaching brilliance that this College can be proud of and should recognize.

Sincerely,

The Students of SW3201:

Tiffany Lumpkins
Angie Hargu
Sara Harsen
Donna
Jennifer Kieren
Teresa Gutz
Patricia Ellis
C. J. O'Brien
Alicia Lake
Luan Perkins
Lara A. Harkin
Bo Thal
Amy Astead
June Dye
Denise Rax
Michelle Kramer

Miriam Haak
Tracey Dennis
Carla Shapiro
Michael Temp
Jacob Jay
Anna Rodell
Gacy Spawohl
Michelle Halloran
Wana Hufta
Lara Helmer
Stephanie Enlow
Elizabeth McKenna
Lola M. White
Cia J. Long
Riley Jones
Joelle Weiss

POST NOTE: Allister Butler is currently at home in South Africa burying his mother and tending to the needs of his grieving family. He has faxed us a copy of his statement of teaching philosophy and a copy of his professional vitae. Under the circumstances we hope the lack of print quality will be tolerated.

Thank you