

Memorandum

To: Harry Hellenbrand, Dean, College of Liberal Arts

From: Doug Keesey, Chair, English Department

Date: March 18, 2002

Subject: Post-Tenure Review of Professor Steven Marx

Teaching

Whether it be with live performances, multimedia work, or Cal Poly Land field trips, Professor Marx is renowned for being one of Cal Poly's most innovative teachers. As peer evaluator Professor John Hampsey rightfully notes after a recent visit to one of Professor Marx's classes, "I was impressed by how seamlessly [he] combined technologies and pedagogies."

In the English 204 (CORE Literature) class I attended this quarter (Winter 2002), I too witnessed Professor Marx's imaginative use of some of the latest teaching tools. By video-projecting one of his Web pages onto a large screen, Professor Marx was able to outline the key points of the day's discussion so that students could better follow them; to jump to key passages and images related to the text so that students could really see what was being discussed; and to point students toward other Websites where they could find additional information on the subject, such as relevant Biblical references. This teaching technology was not an alien imposition, but a vital part of the instructional hour, fully complementing the more traditional blackboard and textbook, which were also being used. Then, as an effective way to get students interested in the somewhat obscure politics of Shakespeare's The Tempest, Professor Marx led the students in a discussion of utopias—Gonzalo's, More's, and our own ideas of the perfect society. Professor Marx asked his students challenging questions, and helped them to make a personal connection with the material by introducing elements of his own life and passion for literature. Carefully calling on a variety of students (not just the same few ones), Professor Marx provided positive confirmation to them when their responses were on the mark. As the discussion moved on to issues of romance in the play, class participation increased even more. It was clear to me that Professor Marx's many teaching strategies—both new and traditional—were quite successful in getting students engaged with the literary material.

Student comments on course evaluations bear out my positive impression from visiting one of Professor Marx's classes. Here is a sampling of what the students have had to say:

From Winter 1999 English 339 Introduction to Shakespeare:

- "Professor Marx truly loves his subject and is very knowledgeable about this period."

From Fall 1999 English 346 Ethnic Literature:

- "Dr. Marx is an excellent professor. He is very knowledgeable and excited about the subject matter. He selected excellent books for the class to read. I gained a lot of knowledge from the reading we did in this class. The assignments were reasonable and

were returned in a timely manner. Dr. Marx is also very approachable to students who have questions or seek help.”

From Spring 2001 English 380 Eco-Lit:

- “Dr. Marx’s enthusiasm for the course subject infected everyone in the class. By the end of the course I caught the Ecolit bug through my daily writings and participation in class field trips. ...I never have had a class at Cal Poly in which I learned so much from the teacher but from my classmates as well.”
- “This course was a brilliant addition to [the] C[al] Poly curriculum. I hope more students (every student) can have the opportunity to learn to appreciate the land we are so fortunate to enjoy.”

Students reserved particular praise for the active learning which Professor Marx encouraged, such as journal writing, field trips, multimedia work, and theatrical performances.

The occasional complaints about tough grading and about strict attendance and lateness policies should be taken, I think, as compliments. Holding students to high standards and requiring prompt attendance are both laudable, even if not all students realize it.

However, students did raise a few other concerns to which Professor Marx may want to give some consideration. Since some students felt that the grading criteria and paper guidelines were unclear, perhaps additional time could be given to going over these standards. Since some students wanted Professor Marx to be more open to interpretations different from his own, maybe he could explain a bit more fully why certain interpretations tend to be considered more valid than others. Some students felt there was too much lecture and not enough class discussion. All teachers face the challenge of finding the right balance between lecture, which can challenge students to achieve greater insight, and class discussion, which can get them involved in active learning.

I would like to make one final suggestion regarding Professor Marx’s grades, which seemed somewhat high, particularly for General Education classes. For example, in his Spring 2001 English 380 Eco-Lit course, there were only four grades lower than a B-, and in each of the Fall 2000 and Winter 1999 sections of his English 339 Introduction to Shakespeare class, there were only two grades lower than a B-. I would encourage Professor Marx to maintain the rigor of his grading, as he did in such courses as his Fall 1999 English 346 Ethnic Literature class, where there were eight grades lower than a B-.

Service

Professor Marx has made absolutely essential contributions to the future of Cal Poly through his proactive leadership in a variety of roles related to environmental issues. As a member of the Campus Planning Committee, as author and editor on the Natural Resources Task Force for the Campus Master Plan, as Coordinator of the Cal Poly Land Project and Centennial Seminar, as co-creator of Cal Poly Land: A Field Guide, and as a proponent of the Campus Sustainability Initiative, Professor Marx has made crucial contributions to the understanding and appreciation of Cal Poly’s natural environment. Professor Hampsey is not exaggerating when he says that “no one at the university has played a more important role in recent years in urging the recognition and preservation of the Cal Poly environs than [Professor] Marx.”

In addition, Professor Marx has served ably on a number of key department and college committees. For the College of Liberal Arts, he has participated on the Faculty Leave Committee, the PSSI Committee, and the FMI Appeals Committee. The latter two committees

involved considerable stress, and Professor Marx is to be commended for his willingness to take them on. For the English Department, Professor Marx has helped students navigate the curriculum as both a major and minor advisor, and he has worked with other faculty on the CORE Committee to link courses, knowledge, and skills in the CORE literature sequence of the newly revised major. Finally, Professor Marx has been a wonderfully reliable participant at departmental events for students and faculty, and he and his wife are owed a particular debt of gratitude for their willingness to host a visiting job candidate during the last round of hiring.

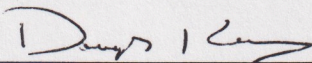
Professional Development

This is an area in which Professor Marx excels. Perhaps his most significant contribution in the category of traditional publication is Shakespeare and the Bible, a book published by the prestigious Oxford University Press in 2000. However, also of importance are critical essays he has published in refereed journals such as Renaissance Forum, Journal of the American Academy of Religion, and Early Modern Literary Studies. Professor Marx has also presented his work at several conferences, including those run by the Shakespeare Association of America, the Shakespeare Institute, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, and Whitworth College.

Professor Marx's Websites and multimedia contributions deserve a category of their own. These combine several forms of scholarship, including those of teaching and integration. There are his Cal Poly Land Website; his multimedia essay, "Greenaway's Books"; and his multimedia Website on the teaching of Shakespeare, "Triangulating Shakespeare." In the aftermath of September 11, Professor Marx gave a multimedia presentation to the Cal Poly community entitled "The Towers: Reflections on September 11." Using both the time-tested medium of paper and the newer digital media, Professor Marx has succeeded in combining the best of traditional scholarship and pioneering spirit.

Conclusion

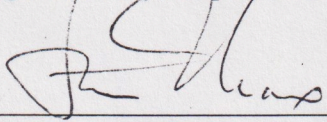
Professor Marx remains a vitally contributing member of the Cal Poly English faculty.



Douglas Keeseey, Department Chair

3.18.02

Date



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Comments by the Faculty Member Under Review: