

March 19, 2012

Awards Committee On Distinguished Teaching  
Faculty Senate of the California State University

Dear members of the committee,

We write jointly to support the nomination of Professor Jerry Schutte for the Distinguished Teaching Award. We knew before we started this process that nominating him for this award was long overdue. We similarly knew that he is such an obvious and excellent choice for this award that he should have received it several times by now. Yet as we began to receive and review letters that others submitted on his behalf, it became even clearer to us that there is simply no equal, by any measure. He is, and for many years has been, a superlative teacher – and the *dozens* of supporting letters confirm this claim. We therefore liberally draw from those letters in providing cover to this nomination.

Professor Schutte is “certainly a teacher that distinguishes himself from the rest” (Stephanie Kimberling). He is “a teacher of the highest quality and caliber” (Dave Ballard), “a true inspiration for his students and for us educators” (Sandra Chong), “the first developer of many great innovations in education” and a “true visionary [who]... deserves more recognition” (Ruzanna Abovyan) as “one of the most innovative and responsible professors on campus” (Wendy Wang). He is “an excellent example for our organization” (Dave Ballard) and “one of the best kept secrets... at the university” (David Boyns). He is “an extraordinary professor and a wonderful human being” (Esther Villegas-Sandoval), a true gentleman filled with the “kindness, patience, dedication and statistics expertise to be the mark of a Distinguished Professor” (Sarah Luery).

The Faculty Senate has identified six criteria by which nominees for the Distinguished Teaching award should be judged. We have organized the remainder of this letter according to those criteria, and drawn supportive elements from the thirty-three (33) letters of support, according to those six criteria. In summary, we find that Professor Schutte more than qualifies for the award by each of these criteria, and that he does so to such a degree that it would be inconceivable that he *not* win this award.

**1. A solid command of the subject:** This criterion implies not only background and training, as well as student recognition, but an ability to instill in others a desire to emulate that knowledge. As such, Professor Schutte embodies the very definition. His background and training are impeccable. He is a UCLA PhD, a Stanford Post-doctoral Fellow and a former Columbia University Professor. Moreover, his student evaluations consistently refer to Professor Schutte as intelligent and brilliant, both in their written comments as well as their quantitative rankings. Indeed, his teaching evaluations for the last two years (particularly on the measure of “The instructor seems knowledgeable in the course material”) average well above a 4.9 on a 5 point scale!

But nothing speaks better to an instructor's solid command of the subject and ability to impart that knowledge than testimony by students who have used that knowledge to further their education, secure employment, or even apply it to raising a family. In that regard, students' letters are consistent in articulating how they have applied knowledge from his courses. "I use these tools in raising my son and in my career" (Qiana Rendine). "Dr. Schutte made an impact on my ambition to learn more about the subject to the point of considering furthering my education at a master's level" (Jason Castro). "I remember what he told me on the last day of class: Edwin it is an obligation for you to come back and make a change in the community." (Edwin Hernandez). Mr. Hernandez is now a master's student in Bilingual School Counseling at New York University and assists with immigration research. And Donna Sinclair claims she was "taken to a new level and quality of life" and had "a life altering experience" taking Professor Schutte's class.

**2. Knowledge of recent developments in the nominee's field:** Tracking developments in teaching strategies for Sociology defines Professor Schutte's last 20 years of academic endeavor, a record that has not gone unnoticed. Provost Hellenbrand writes "Professor Schutte's commitment to and refinement of the form and content of the university's pedagogy have been superlative". Moreover, Dean Theodoulou notes "not only has he been an early adopter for online and hybrid teaching technology, but more importantly, has been an advocate for the assessment in each of these venues". While Professor Schutte arguably is the first professor on campus who carried out online/hybrid teaching, he has always had a present-aware and forward-looking approach to teaching, incorporating empirical research, pedagogical innovations, and technological developments into his work. Others note that he "created reusable learning objects and made his lectures and problem-solving exercises available on demand, 24/7, providing linguistically and culturally diverse students with much needed opportunities for repeated exposures and individualized tutorials" (Sandra Chong). She adds, "[he] willingly shares his knowledge and wisdom in teaching and learning with his colleagues, mentoring new and seasoned faculty in his department and college, as well as those across the colleges and disciplines."

He has been an "enthusiastic explorer in the forefront of instructional technologies" and "the first to experiment with hybrid formats, the first to pilot online and virtual labs, the first to pioneer electronic texts, and most noticeably, among the first in the country to teach a course entirely online" (Victor Shaw). "His self-reflection, analysis and reporting have been a hallmark of Jerry's teaching. The results have been evident not only in the positive effects on his own teaching as evidenced by his stellar student evaluations, but by the effects he has had on teaching practice among his colleagues at CSUN, within the discipline of sociology, and more broadly in higher education" (David Levin). Or as Wayne Smith puts it, "Jerry is the one I look to first to see what topics matter, and the one I look to last to see how to turn new knowledge into an action.... [His] thinking and action in these areas is at least 5-10 years ahead.... Jerry can estimate when we'll get there, what the persistent value is as aligned with our teaching and research mission, and which supporting processes will need to change in order to get us there." Indeed, Wayne had Professor Schutte in mind as he "penned each sentence" of a proposal for a *new* Senate award, for Innovation and Leadership in Academic Technology.

**3. Creative and imaginative presentations:** Professor Schutte's use of technology in the learning process is one, but not the only way in which he provides *creative and imaginative presentations*. Another is how he hooks students with the creative way he structures his class, even from the first day: For example, he starts with a question that he does not answer until later in the semester, when doing so is relevant to the concepts being taught. This peaks student interest and focuses them on finding the answer; or as students put it he encourages us to always think "outside the box" (Leticia Santana).

Such techniques cause others to observe “[A]fter the first hour I knew that Jerry was different, and as a result so was the class” (Danielle Coughlan). One student explains that in his experience, “Professor Schutte has not only taught me stats and methods, but has inspired me to seek out questions...from the first day I met professor Schutte, I knew I would have an experience with him that would change my life forever” (Shant Deravanesian).

Professor Schutte has always been a creative and imaginative teacher, from the structure of individual lectures (including the first of each semester) to the presentation of entire courses. For example, he “piloted the first TTh 6:30 a.m. class, the first Saturday class, and the first Sunday class” (Victor Shaw). However, among his most creative innovations was the combination of two courses – SOC364 (Social Statistics) and SOC497 (Research Methods) – so that “the statistics the students learned in class could immediately be applied to the research methods when their memories were still fresh” (Wendy Wang). He has even been creative and imaginative with respect to capital outlays, bringing CSUN “the first ever combined CATI Lab/Classroom, use of the first Symposium, an application of the first push-pull computer project technology, to the benefit of students and student learning” (Victor Shaw). Indeed, his teaching has been so creative and imaginative that he “has helped shape policy and direct resources” on a wide range of issues, including “curriculum, course scheduling, information technology, web design, pedagogy, departmental politics, faculty contracts, space allocation, personnel, and student success ratios” (Dominic Little). Moreover, even our own Senior Director of Academic Technology notes “While many faculty technology pioneers are eager to try every new cool technology for its own sake, Jerry’s motivation is always how the new technology or new technique will make him a better teacher and how it will improve his students’ learning” (David Levin).

**4. The ability to engage students in the learning process:** The ability to engage students means not only to capture their attention, but to motivate them to be more than they are. Professor Schutte has demonstrated this ability, in challenging classes and with a notable degree of holism and motivation. His Social Statistics/Research Methods combination has been described by students as “the hardest class that I’ve ever taken and yet it remains my favorite class” (Leticia Santana), “the most challenging yet beneficial class I have ever taken” (Melissa Kieffer) and “the most productive subject I have had in my college career” (Ruzanna Abovyan). “I can’t think of any class I have ever studied twenty-five plus hours a week for, but there was never a time when I felt frustrated or confused” (Shant Deravanesian).

His engagement with students is remarkably *holistic*. He exhibits “an unwavering commitment... [and] wholehearted dedication... to students and student success through skill-centered training and role-modeling” (Victor Shaw). He not only “leads students from one step to another until they finally understand difficult advanced concepts” (Wendy Wang); he also turns students who feared failing core courses into confident scientists, “transformation so profound, that its affect can only be measured in perpetuity; an awakening of sorts” (Dominic Little). Professor Schutte pushes students (and encourages them to push themselves) “to find unique and novel ways to study and understand the topic” at hand (Matt Grindal). Professor Schutte has consistently “made it a priority to be an available resource, patiently staying well-beyond virtually every class period as to ensure he met the needs of each individual” (Stephanie Kimberling). His engagement is so superlative that it truly *motivates* students. He has such “an infectious passion and devotion to teaching” that “it is with rare exception that you will find a person, who so easily incites in his students an exuberance for learning and fosters an insatiable intellectual fervor” (Dominic Little). “He demonstrated that no matter how challenging a course may be, it’s very important to have faith in one’s self ability without doubt and always ask questions (Leticia Santana). “I have never worked so hard, [n]or been so proud of a grade in my entire schooling career (Ashley Chaffee).

Professor Schutte also engages students in the learning process with a “partner system” whereby students with high grades on the first exam are paired with students with low grades for the duration of the semester. Students who have written recommendation letters claim that this assured that every student understood the material and would pass the course, and that this system is part of “not letting his students fail” either “each other or themselves” (Rosaelena Marquez)

**5. Excellent communication skills:** Communication skill involve both the ability to convey information and the capacity to inspire the confidence to encourage trust and dialogue in return. Professor Schutte possesses such excellent communication skills. This is evident in the environment of support, comfort, and encouragement he has created. Edwin Hernandez speaks of his ability to “foster a warm and open learning environment” and quell his worries by “instilling hope” through his “unwavering support and kind words” of “being genuine, open, and empathetic toward our diverse class of students”. Rosaelena Marquez referenced Professor Schutte’s understanding of “the natural fears and limitations of the class” while working “tiresomely to increase the level of knowledge and self-confidence within each of his students.” Other comments say “Dr. Schutte always encouraged questions and never belittled his students regardless of how dull the questions may be” (Leticia Santana). “I also remember prior to our final examination receiving an email from Dr. J giving me that extra support and confidence that I really needed” (Erin Wilson). “[P]rofessor Schutte is an amazing individual who promotes a level of comfort that makes everyone feel at ease to talk to him on a personal level” (Shant Deravanesian). “I know my success was not due to the amount of time I dedicated to the class but to the amount of time Dr J dedicated to me....Dr J helped me believe in my abilities and encouraged me to be more confident in my work.” (Ruzanna Abovyan)

Because Professor Schutte is able to communicate well to the students, they communicate back. They have done so with an extensive use of superlatives in both recommendation letters and student evaluations. Students echo “best or finest professor or teacher”, “the most generous”, “the most caring”, “help with reaching one’s full potential”, “amazing”, and “awesome”. Danielle Coughlan said it well: “I have never witnessed nor heard of such a dedicated professor like Dr. Schutte. He is completely and utterly devoted to the success of his students.” Students call him professor, but they also call him mentor, advisor, friend, and even parent. They call Professor Schutte “an inspirational instructor” (Sarah Luery) and “a very dedicated, caring, and personable teacher” (Nayla Huq) who is “extremely helpful and compassionate” and gives students “endless words of encouragement, both in undergraduate and graduate school” (Esther Villegas-Sandoval). Having “coupled his high standards and criticism with a level of support which has been matched by few” (Matt Grindal), he not only has “a way of alleviating the anxiety brought on by multivariate statistical analyses and intricate SPSS outputs” (Stephanie Kimberling) but has “an incredible ability to connect with all of his students” (Esther Villegas-Sandoval).

Even beyond coursework, he makes students feel “confident pursuing goals which [they] had previously considered unattainable” (Matt Grindal). He has “the courage to *empower* a troublesome student, rather than trying to delegitimize their actions” (Jesse Fletcher). He “works well with students and mentors them in the classroom and out,” to such an extent that students and colleagues alike are awed by his ability to make the subject understandable and relevant for our students” (Dave Ballard). He “treats them as fellow researchers and scholars” and “makes learning meaningful for his students by generating research questions that address the real educational and social problems from their everyday lives” (Sandra Chong).

**6. A concern for the welfare and future of the nominee's students:** A concern for the welfare and future of the nominee's students is a common theme in recommendation letters written by students. "[P]rofessor Schutte's way of presenting the commitment he showed in making people fundamentally understand how they can use the knowledge acquired in the class in their everyday world, actually made me look forward to going to class" (Shant Deravanesian). "[M]ost of all he wanted to see us succeed" (Ashley Chaffee). "He genuinely cares about his students and I'm very fortunate to have been instructed by such an outstanding professor" (Leticia Santana). "Essentially, he helped me understand that our career choice is a reflection of ourselves and the relationship we want to have with this world" (Jason Castro). "I also learned a lot about life" (Ashley Chaffee). "I walked into his class as a fearsome graduating senior afraid of the 'real world' and walked out as an adult ready to take charge of my future" (Rosaelena Marquez). "Professor Schutte's class has taught me how to be a careful and creative thinker, which has served me well both in my education at CSU Northridge and outside" (Iveta Petrosyan). "It wasn't just statistics and research methods he taught, but certain ways of thinking and study habits that benefited me and helped me succeed throughout the whole semester and to this day" (Melissa Kieffer).

Professor Schutte "makes [students] believe in themselves," resulting in "stellar student evaluation of faculty—an average of 5 across courses, over time—and the long waiting list of students wanting to add his classes" (Sandra Chong). Ultimately, he "show[s] our students what it is to teach by example and demonstrating what it is to be an educated adult with social and community responsibilities" (Dave Ballard). His former graduate students call him "deeply influential on [their] own development and direction as a sociological researcher" (Jesse Fletcher). When our graduate students go elsewhere, colleagues in their new homes recognize that their "skill and education were a direct reflection of the time [they] spent under the wing of Dr. Schutte" (Michael Carter). A number of graduate students have written that they would not be where they are today were it not for Professor Schutte (including, in particular, Jesse Fletcher and Matt Grindal). They attribute their success beyond their education here to his "high standard of expectations for his students, while at the same time providing a level of support far beyond that dictated by the university" (Matt Grindal). He has even provided support to students in other colleges as noted by Wayne Smith, who knew that Professor Schutte "would not only be available and accessible for a deep student-led discussion, he could help the student design an academic and professional success plan" and that he "crafts and nurtures world-class student-professionals that will succeed in a number of intellectual, economic, and social areas."

We cannot express with sufficient strength or certainty our conviction that Professor Schutte is not only eminently qualified to be the recipient of this award, but that the Faculty Senate (and, indeed, his colleagues, ourselves included) are long overdue in recognizing and properly acknowledging his historical, consistent, and ongoing excellence in teaching. We therefore implore you to consider the weight of the evidence in his favor, and hope that you will agree: Professor Jerry Schutte is *the* superlatively Distinguished Teacher at CSUN, this past year as in so many previously.

Most sincerely,

Loretta Winters  
Professor of Sociology  
loretta.winters@sbcglobal.net

Ellis Godard  
Assistant Professor of Sociology  
egodard@csun.edu