

Sally Miller

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TO: COMMITTEE TO REVIEW NOMINATIONS FOR 1983 FAYE AND ALEX SPANOS
DISTINGUISHED TEACHING AWARD

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FROM: KATHLEEN PETERSON, COLLEGE OF THE PACIFIC SENIOR
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RE: NOMINATION OF FACULTY MEMBER FOR SPANOS AWARD

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NOMINEE: DR. SALLY M. MILLER, HISTORY DEPARTMENT, COP

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My nomination for the 1983 Faye and Alex Spanos Distinguished
Teaching Award is Dr. Sally M. Miller, of the History Department.

I have been overwhelmingly impressed by her excellence in teach-
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As a senior in the College of the Pacific, I have had many opportunities to interact with a good percentage of the faculty of COP. As a result, I have come away with the impression that the University's largest school is staffed by a multitude of competent, responsive and involved individuals. In another university each of these professionals might be recognized for their abilities, as they all would stand out from the crowd. However, with such a high "average," so to speak, it becomes very difficult to choose one individual who deserves recognition out of such an outstanding field. This difficulty is the reason that, in the four years I have been at UOP, I have never nominated any faculty member for this award. It is with the understanding then, that only someone who possesses true distinguishing characteristics would prompt me take this action--that is, I am not submitting this nomination "lightly."

My nomination for the 1983 Faye and Alex Spanos Distinguished Teaching Award is Dr. Sally M. Miller, of the History Department. I have been overwhelmingly impressed by her excellence in teaching, and equally pleased by her personal concern for, and interaction with, students. I have taken three classes with Dr. Miller in the last year, and I feel well qualified to speak of abilities as a teacher.

All three of the classes I have taken with Dr. Miller have been more than worthwhile, in that she has taught me a great deal--about history, writing and the general nature of people--and her classes have made me think (often on my feet) more so than is often true of other classes. On top of all that, her

Her method is the use of a format of short lecture, followed by discussion. Her classes have been enjoyable because she conducts her classes in such a way that the best of each student comes out, with a little prodding from her (which is carefully kept away from humiliation). She has a sense of humor which comes out in class; and best of all, she is a human being--something important in the establishment of a professor-student relationship.

It is clear from the first day in any of her classes that Dr. Miller possesses expertise in her field, history. Never has she failed to present a well-organized, logical class lecture in which carefully explained ideas and problems are brought forth and explored with the class in an intelligent, clear manner. I was immediately amazed at her ability to communicate difficult and complicated ideas with ease. Ideas which were hard to grasp as explained by others became clear with Dr. Miller's explanations and discussions.

As an accomplished historian, and a publishing member of the faculty (never had I met anyone who had written so much), Dr. Miller has garnered a great deal of respect from me. This respect for Dr. Miller has been the driving force behind her ability to motivate students (including myself, to be sure). I want Dr. Miller to respect me, as a student, as much as I respect her, as a dedicated historian. Therefore, I try to do my best (as I know others do, also) in her classes to achieve that respect from her.

Dr. Miller's classroom method is one which also motivates students to do well, and which, in addition, facilitates the learning process and increases her effectiveness in that arena.

Her method is the use of a format of short lecture, followed by class discussion. It is in this area of class discussion that so few professors seem to really excel. Whereas Dr. Miller's questions motivate answers and more questions--that is, class participation--other professors invoke pure fear. This is not to say that there is not an element of pressure to answer questions correctly (there must be to have any participation whatsoever), it is just that this element is not taken to absurd ends, where a student is afraid to come to class. Students in Dr. Miller's classes do not fear coming to class...but they do come prepared. It is the combination of this classroom method and the desire to do well for someone you respect that really facilitates the learning process and definitely motivates the students. (I know it motivates me!) I could trust her, and I was. As Dr. Miller seems to have secured this appropriate middle ground for classroom discussion--which inspires not fear, but preparation for class--students are more likely to ask her questions during and after class. The best grounds for a professor-student relationship (this classroom give and take, without a malingering fear) are laid. Students feel that they can talk to Dr. Miller about class or about personal problems because classroom performance is not based on fear and intimidation, but by respect and mutual admiration. None but the bravest of students will attempt to talk to a professor who is feared by the entire class, or who seems completely aloof and disinterested in students' needs. In Dr. Miller's classes, however, not a day goes by that someone doesn't stay after class to ask her about something in class, or about a problem in their major,

or even about a personal problem. Dr. Miller encourages students to come talk to her about whatever is on their minds--she does not give off the feeling that she doesn't want students coming to "bother" her. It is because of the type of professor-student relationship which was laid in the classroom, and because of Dr. Miller's not willingness and desire to have students come talk to her that I went to her last fall with a serious personal problem. I just think I would not have gone to any other professor to talk about this problem--in fact, I neither had any peers with whom I really wanted to discuss the problem. Due to the impression that I have received from the interaction I had already had with Dr. Miller, that is, a willingness to interact with students, I went to her when I would go to no one else. I felt I could trust her, and I was right. She immediately set into action the steps that were necessary for the resolution of my problem, even though it had nothing to do with her, or class, etc. She was very concerned about me, and wanted to do whatever she could to help, without "butting in," which she was afraid of doing (but didn't).

At the point at which I went to talk to Dr. Miller, I didn't know what to do or where to go for help. She directed me and it was her concern, exemplified by her immediate action, and about her desire to know things were progressing after the initial in period, that really picked me up. It made me feel much better just having such concern and personal involvement by her, instead of cold advice. In helping students in any way she can.

She does not live in an "Ivory tower," as many do. Though she is obviously a very busy professional, with her own life, she

often It is clear, then, that Dr. Miller has been most responsive to my needs and concerns, and was obviously willing to interact closely with me, as a student. As important is the fact that me, I wanted to talk to her--which shows the positive kind of relationship that is built between Dr. Miller and her students.

Of course, the personal problem to which I alluded was not the only thing I have gone to Dr. Miller to talk about. I have asked her about possibilities for my future, and she has suggested many paths that I might follow. She has helped me to try to find in myself those things that I am capable of doing, and to try to formulate possible goals as related to my capabilities. We have had discussions concerning schools I might look into, as she knows now my personal preferences for a school and area. She often has asked me to come by and talk to her whenever I have something on my mind, and it is in this kind of relaxed atmosphere that I am able to discuss myself and what I would like to do. I feel as though I am not just a social security number to Dr. Miller, that she is truly concerned about me and my needs, concerns, and future. With her immediate action and personal concern often it is the situation that a professor is so involved in his or her research and writing that he or she does not have time for regular classes, much less for talking to students about whatever is on their minds. Dr. Miller is actively involved in research, has written a great deal, prepares extensively for her classes--yet she is still very involved, as you can see from my own experiences, in helping students in any way she can. She does not live in an "ivory tower," as many do. Though she is obviously a very busy professional, with her own life too (we often forget that), she has time for all of her students, and

often forget that about professionals), she has time for any student who wants to talk to her, and needs some kind of assistance. She has made it clear to me, at least, that I am always welcome, and has been more than willing to meet me outside of regular office hours.

Clearly, I think a great deal of Dr. Miller. I have taken the time and effort to nominate her for this award because it seemed the natural thing to do when I looked at the criteria upon which this award is to be based. I feel very strongly about her effectiveness in class, due to her expertise and ability to explain texts with clarity. I think her ability to facilitate the learning process is no doubt strengthened greatly by the discussion method which she has seemed to have honed to a fine point of refinement, encouraging participation and preparation. Also, clearly the respect which she inspires in her students motivates them to do their best--to gain her respect reciprocally, not to do so out of fear. From my personal experience, Dr. Miller has proved beyond a shadow of a doubt her responsiveness to student needs and concerns with her immediate action and personal concern on her part for me and my problem. Her willingness to interact with students is shown constantly in her encouragements for us to come talk to her, her lack of an "superior" attitude which puts off students, and her general desire to get to know her students. Finally, I have been directly helped in discovering capacities I have, and in formulating goals for my future by discussions with her.

My reason for nominating Dr. Sally M. Miller is simple: I think that she deserves this award, based on my classroom and personal

experiences with her. As I said earlier, I have never nominated anyone for this award in the four years I have been at UOP. I have never felt that anyone stood above the crowd, so to speak, so much as when I took classes from Dr. Miller and was able to get to know her. Each criterion seemed to be met overwhelmingly by her, and this time, I just couldn't ignore the award for lack of ability to choose. This year I found someone outstanding, and I thank you for the opportunity to talk about her. My only wish is that I had "discovered" her earlier and had been able to take more classes with her, because she is truly one of the College of the Pacific's invaluable assets.

Thank you for taking the time to read my nomination.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Peterson

Kathleen Peterson, Senior, COP
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*① This academic year I have spoken at a half-dozen on-site service groups, churches, on Stockton history especially ethnic
② I am being interviewed by the local newspaper
If you need anything additional, let me know.
Thanks.*