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Nomination for Faye and Alex Spanos Distinguished Teaching Award, 1983

Nominee: Dr. Sally M. Miller

How I actually prefer classes with a lecture/discussion format rather
My name is Michele Ennis, I am a senior in College of the Pacific, and I would like to nominate Dr. Sally M. Miller for the 1983 Faye and Alex Spanos Distinguished Teaching Award. I have taken three history courses from Dr. Miller--U.S. Intellectual History I, Women in Time and Place, and Emergence of Modern America; and I am currently involved in an independent study--Problems in Recent U.S. History--with her. During this period of time I have been quite impressed by Dr. Miller's dealings with students both in and out of the classroom. She puts a lot of time and energy into her teaching, and is genuinely interested in her students as individuals. These things come through in her classes, and her students really respond to them.

One of the things which I have enjoyed in taking classes from Dr. Miller is the "low key" atmosphere she maintains in the classroom. A certain amount of class participation/discussion is required and encouraged in her classes, but she never purposely puts anyone on the spot or deliberately embarrasses him/her during these discussions. There is generally a very relaxed atmosphere in which class participation is not a threatening experience and actually becomes quite enjoyable. I remember being very apprehensive at the beginning of the U.S. Intellectual History I course because I knew a good portion of class time was to be spent in discussion, and class participation had always been extremely difficult for me. However, after the first few weeks, I began to

relax and became more confident in myself as I realized that I could join in and contribute to the discussion knowing that I would not be totally embarrassed if my comment was not quite correct. Now I actually prefer classes with a lecture/discussion format rather than straight lecture, whereas in the past I used to dread them. I think the confidence I gained from being in Dr. Miller's classes has played an important role in my change in attitude.

As an instructor, Dr. Miller possesses many qualities and abilities which I find extremely desirable and helpful in a teacher. At the beginning of each course, she clearly spells out what topics will be covered, what the goals of the course are, and what is expected from each student. In her lectures and class discussions there is not much emphasis on dates or other "facts and figures." Instead she concentrates on ideas and events and their ramifications not only for the generation or historical period in which they occurred, but also the manner in which they have affected us today in the United States--how our lives in the United States in 1983 have been shaped and molded by these ideas and events. Her approach gives the material some "life"--some personal relevance which contributes much toward arousing and maintaining students' interest in the material and also helps the student to develop a more critical/analytical approach to history.

Dr. Miller's lectures are always well-prepared, clear, and organized; and she clearly emphasizes the significant aspects of or concepts involved in the topic under consideration. Even when dealing with somewhat dry or murky topics, Dr. Miller can generally anticipate which concepts the class may have difficulty picking out or understanding, and she is able to guide the class through the

As I said, I have found Dr. Miller to be quite interested in reading, helping the class to ferret out and decipher the main points of the piece. Also, Dr. Miller's emphasis upon considering the "real-world" implications of and motivations behind these often very abstract concepts enables the student to more easily grasp their significance. Finally, Dr. Miller always makes sure that the class is clear about a particular topic before proceeding to the next one. I can honestly say that I have never felt "lost" in any of her classes, and it is my impression that the other students in these classes have felt the same way.

In her classes Dr. Miller tries to help her students develop several important skills including critical reading of materials, an analytical approach to topics under consideration, clear verbal and written expression, and the research and writing of papers. In attempting to hone students's skills in these areas, Dr. Miller gives a lot of feedback to students on the work they do both inside and outside of the classroom. She reads tests and papers carefully, commenting, editing, and criticizing wherever appropriate so that students have a clear conception of the strong and weak points of their work. One thing I particularly like about the way Dr. Miller grades papers and tests is that her comments not only point out the weak spots or errors, but also recognize the strong points. She does not hesitate to praise work well done, and she appreciates the time and effort put in on a test or paper. Her feedback to that effect gives the student the feeling that it really was worth the effort and motivates him/her to work even harder. Also, a good word from her means something because she does have high standards and she is a scholar (and it shows!).

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As I said, I have found Dr. Miller to be quite interested in her students as individuals--in their problems and concerns. She is very much respected by her students, yet is quite "approachable" and very personable at the same time. She does not hesitate to give me the extra time and effort to help a student with a problem. For example, in one class I took from Dr. Miller there was a foreign student who had somewhat of a language problem. Dr. Miller had no qualms about spending extra time with this student in order to make sure that she understood what was going on in the class. In the same class (about two years ago) there was another student who developed serious eye problems which eventually required laser surgery. Then last January, I ran into Dr. Miller and she asked me if I'd seen this student recently--she was concerned about how everything had turned out with the student, though over a year had passed since the class! I remember being quite pleased and surprised that a professor would take such a personal interest in her students both inside and outside of the classroom.

Dr. Miller has definitely played a significant role in my academic career at UOP, and she has helped me on a personal level on several occasions. When I took my first course from Dr. Miller, I was working toward a B.S. in Mathematics and, like a few other students in the class, had had a few history courses already. When Dr. Miller found that some of us "non-majors" had a few history courses under our belt, she met with each of us individually to discuss the possibility of taking on a second major in history, and I volunteered to be our adviser. I opted to do this and have recently completed the requirements for a second major in history. Yet had Dr. Miller not approached me as she did, I doubt I would have taken

on a second major, even though I am very interested in the subject.

Over the past couple of years Dr. Miller has given me much encouragement which has really helped to sustain my drive for academic excellence. At the same time I've felt free to come into her office to talk with her about subjects important to me but not related to class work, such as what to look for in a graduate school, pros and cons of taking a year off before starting graduate school, and where I might look for a job when I graduate. Such discussions with Dr. Miller have really helped me to figure out what I want to do in the next few years and how I might set about realizing these goals. I've decided to "take a year off" before going to graduate school to pursue a Ph.D. in mathematics with the aim of becoming a professor of mathematics. Without Dr. Miller's interest, I doubt I would have accomplished as much as I have during the past few years, and I know it wouldn't have been nearly as enjoyable.

I think I can best sum up the relationship between Dr. Miller and her students by describing an incident which occurred in one of her courses last semester. A group of us were sitting in the classroom a few minutes before class was to start, and we just started talking about Dr. Miller--how does she do it all--writes books, gives lectures and speeches, and is generally very involved and so damned intelligent yet still very personable and approachable. It was clear that we all had the same impression of her--we all respected and admired her and were very impressed with her both as an instructor and a person. I've never been in a class before where a spontaneous discussion such as this has arisen, and I think that says a lot about Dr. Miller.

says a lot about Dr. Miller. She represents the best that UOP has to offer--academic excellence and scholarship combined with a very personal approach.

Thank you for your time.

I am willing to recommend the nominee, Dr. Sally Miller, for the Alex H. Spanner Teaching Award.

Sincerely,

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I am a former student of Dr. Miller's (U.S. History of American Immigration, U.S. Intellectual History, Study of the History of Labor in America), and I have the privilege to work with her in many other capacities. For my last two years at UOP, I concurrently served on the Integrated Studies Advisory Board during the year. For over a half-year, I worked on Dr. Miller's research project, "Stockton's Immigrant Women: The Hault Stockton, Too", and then aided her in preparing for the concluding conference and follow-up seminars. And, finally, I served as the student representative on her most recent Faculty Evaluation Committee. Having such diverse insight into Dr. Miller's professional status, I feel that mine is certainly a valid recommendation.

In the introductory course of U.S. History, Dr. Miller presents the subject matter in a very concise, practical manner. Her lectures supplement the assigned readings and she occasionally utilizes film strips to elaborate particular areas. Dr. Miller's lectures are significantly heightened when the subject matter relates to her specialties of labor, women, and immigration. Frequent quizzes are given encouraging diligent study.

It is in the more advanced, focused courses where Dr. Miller displays her effective, knowledgeable teaching style. Inevitably, these courses have fewer students, and are subjects which are areas of special interest. Dr. Miller takes full advantage of these two points: First, she attempts to become aware of her students and their interests. By doing this, she not only projects an openness for the students' needs, but she also tries to work with her students to incorporate their interests into the course. (For example, if she knows that a student in her History of American Immigration course is interested in Southeast Asians, she will encourage that student to write his/her research paper on that group; and she will pass along to that student information pertaining to Southeast Asians.) The fact that these courses are within her areas of special interest is made very obvious. Her enthusiasm for the subject punctuates her lectures. Her knowledge and understanding of the subjects are quite evident. Yet, she clarifies points without alienating her students and without discouraging criticism and inquiry from her students.