

John Tallmadge, Ph.D.

Literary and Educational Consulting

6538 Teakwood Court

Cincinnati OH 45224 • (513) 681-0944 • www.johntallmadge.com

I am delighted to recommend one of my former students, Dr. Kathryn Kurtz, as a candidate for the advertised position in Creative Writing. I have known her for eleven years, ever since she matriculated in my 2001 entry colloquium at the Union Institute, where I was then Core Professor in Literature and Environmental Studies. I served as her principal advisor and mentor throughout her doctoral studies, and she attended three of my interdisciplinary seminars as well. I advised her on her dissertation, approved the draft for her final doctoral committee meeting, and have closely followed her subsequent career as a teacher and writer. She has often expressed to me a passionate love of teaching, and I am sure her energy, intelligence, and intimate knowledge of the writer's craft would captivate students at all levels.

Like many Union learners, Kathryn entered the doctoral program as a mid-career professional with an impressive array of skills and accomplishments gained through both formal education and working life. In her case, she brought a formidable and distinctive writing talent, shaped by her early career in marketing and journalism and her more recent literary and outdoor adventures in the Catskills. During her master's program in creative nonfiction, she had begun an ambitious work on the Catskill high peaks that blended memoir with natural history, local geography, and spiritual quest. She proposed to advance this work at the doctoral level, combining a creative project with a scholarly monograph on the theory and practice of creative nonfiction, emphasizing the genres of memoir, personal essay, and nature writing, with narrative ecocriticism as a theoretical underpinning.

We designed Kathryn's doctoral program to include critical study of the genres relevant to her dissertation as well as contemporary developments in literary theory. We also added course modules on the creative process and in relevant interdisciplinary areas of human and natural history. The aim was to develop advanced proficiency both as a writer and as a scholar. Kathryn's writing style at entry was edgy, poetical, and paratactic, manifesting at once great talent, poetic concentration, energy, and mystery. She needed to work on narrative technique, plotting, thematics, and a sense of audience. A practical internship under one of her adjunct professors, Ian Marshall of Penn State, a leading practitioner of narrative criticism, more than accomplished these goals. The narrative chapters really move along, engaging the reader consistently and developing their themes with sureness and telling effect.

Kathryn also matured tremendously as a scholar during her doctoral program. The papers she wrote for me were deeply informed, insightful, and original in both conception and argument. In one, for example, she developed a novel theory of the personal essay as an ecological process. The contextual monograph portion of her dissertation also explains how the narrative Catskill essays utilize expressive form to mirror the switchback pattern of a mountain trail. This was an original technique that she developed for this project, and it impressed everyone on her committee. I know of nothing like it anywhere in the literature.

Since finishing her Union program, Kathryn has continued to pursue her work in teaching and writing as she seeks a publisher for her Catskill book. I am confident that she will succeed in this effort, given the work's intellectual depth, originality, and stylistic sophistication. Meanwhile, she has completed a second book, a fictionalized treatment of her investigation of suicide by jumping, based on the agonizing experience of her own brother's death. This is a work of wrenching power and heartbreaking insight that will not wait long for a publisher. Given her active writing practice and wide range of teaching experience at area colleges and universities, amply documented in her vita, I am sure she would prove an excellent resource for Rockland Community College students.

I am pleased, therefore, to recommend Kathryn Kurtz not only as an accomplished teacher and writer but also as a scholar of passionate intelligence and originality. She's well-versed in the theory and practice of creative writing, Journalism, and American literature, which she could teach on the undergraduate or the master's level. Please give her candidacy your most thoughtful consideration.

Sincerely,

John Tallmadge

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