Oct. 20, 2010

To: Margaret Nelson, Chair

Department of Sociology-Anthropology

Re: Letter of Recommendation for Dr. Mike Roberts

I have been asked by Dr. Mike Roberts to write a letter of recommendation in support of his application for a tenure track position in the Department of Sociology-Anthropology at Middlebury College. Dr. Roberts has been a colleague of mine in the Sociology Department at San Diego State University for the last six years. He has asked me to write the letter of recommendation with an emphasis on his qualities and abilities as a teacher. I am pleased to do so and I believe that I am in a good position to write such a letter. I have been on the Personnel Committee of the Sociology Department for the last three semesters and in that capacity have had access to student evaluations for all faculty. Also Dr. Roberts and I both teach theory courses; he teaches upper division classical theory, among his other courses, and I teach upper division contemporary theory. Most often students take the two courses in order, so students come to my course after having taken the classical theory course from Dr. Roberts.

Dr. Roberts consistently receives the highest quantitative student evaluations in the department. And his qualitative evaluations are full of comments commending his teaching style and its success. This high praise is also reflected in comments students make in my class about his theory class. The most frequent of the many positive comments is that because of Dr. Roberts’ teaching method students have been able to engage with material that they either thought they had no interest in or previously thought was inaccessible to them. He has twice been chosen Outstanding Faculty Member and honored at Graduation ceremonies for this award. The recipient of the award is chosen by the outstanding graduating senior in the department. The student evaluations, comments and awards reflect his abilities and qualities as a teacher and his commitment to teaching

This commitment to teaching is reflected in his teaching method. It is a threefold method: it is student centered, it emphasizes primary sources, and it emphasizes writing. Dr. Roberts assigns primary source readings for each class and then discusses the readings with students in class. He then has the students write a paper on the material that they have covered. The students say that this combination which also includes Dr. Roberts’ ability to explain the material during discussion in an understandable way is

what makes him such a good teacher. I can confirm the success of his teaching method because the students that come to my class from his class have as thorough a knowledge of classical theory as it is possible to get in a single semester.

Dr. Roberts has continued his commitment to student centered teaching despite the fact that the University has abandoned its commitment to teaching and continues to increase class sizes and increase work loads while rewarding research faculty and devaluing teaching. Because I am also committed to teaching, I understand his desire to find a position at a University that emphasizes teaching. However, I feel that his leaving will be a significant loss to the department and the university. I believe that Dr. Roberts will be a valuable addition to any Sociology Department and recommend him wholeheartedly. If I can be of any further help, I can be reached at [psemm@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:psemm@mail.sdsu.edu) or 619-594-5906.

Sincerely,

Paul Semm

Professor of Sociology, Dept of Sociology

San Diego State University