



August 31, 2023

Dr. Elizabeth McDermott
Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences
University of St. Francis
500 Wilcox Street
Joliet, IL 60435

Dear Dean McDermott:

It gives me great pleasure to offer my enthusiastic support for Dr. Kevin Spicer's application for promotion to Full Professor of English at the University of St. Francis. Dr. Spicer has been my department chair in English and Foreign Languages for five of the six years I have been on the faculty at USF. As I am confident his application materials will demonstrate his continued excellence in teaching and scholarship since his promotion to Associate Professor, I would like to focus on his achievements in service, particularly his leadership as department chair.

I am not sure I would have realized my first year at USF was also Dr. Spicer's first year as department chair if I didn't learn he would take on this role at my job interview; his competence and confidence seemed more characteristic of a seasoned chair than someone new to the role. From our first conversation after I was hired on, he has been an endless resource for information and support. The calm confidence with which he steers the department has been a model for me as I increase my own leadership activities as a junior faculty member. "I'll take care of it" is the refrain that echoes in my mind as I reflect on my interactions with Dr. Spicer in his capacity as chair. This might sound simple, but I make note of this refrain because it encapsulates Dr. Spicer's supportive leadership style. Bureaucratic matters like completing tutorial forms or making schedule adjustments have always been, invariably and quickly, "cared for" so that I could go about the business of teaching, conducting research, or mentoring students. This kind of "care" works behind the scenes and makes itself invisible—over the years I have started to slowly learn just how much work has been involved in the way Dr. Spicer takes care of bureaucratic processes to make his colleagues' working lives easier. In this

way, Dr. Spicer strongly supports the mission of USF by making it easier for the rest of us in the department to do our jobs and to support students.

Here is another Dr. Spicer refrain: “come sit!” Any time I stop by the office, I am warmly invited to sit and chat; somehow, despite the copious hours Dr. Spicer gives to his students in office hours conversations, he always seems to have time for another chat with a colleague. These conversations range from advising me on how to handle a difficult student dynamic or logistical conundrum to long conversations about literary theory. Not only has Dr. Spicer read nearly all of the scholarship I have produced since my time at USF, but he has directly shaped my research through these conversations. My most recently published article, for example, engages the work of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein. Dr. Spicer’s expertise in psychoanalytic theory was invaluable as I was starting this research project; we talked through Klein’s concept of repair, which helped me write and eventually publish my article. Similarly, I have talked through so many assignment ideas and had so many conversations about the texts I am teaching with Dr. Spicer. I always come away from these conversations having learned something new or turning over a new question in my mind. His imprint on my career is indelible, and just as he supports the university through his excellent administrative skills, he fulfills the USF mission in the way he supports junior colleagues like myself. Our welcoming community of learners extends beyond our classrooms, and Dr. Spicer’s intellectual camaraderie has truly welcomed me.

Dr. Spicer models not only collegiality but also the kind of hunger for knowledge that probably got us all in this business in the first place, but which we can easily lose sight of in the daily grind of updating Canvas and attending committee meetings. We attended the South Bend Digital Humanities Research Institute in 2019, in the early stages of our work to develop Digital Humanities programming at USF. Since this time, Dr. Spicer has built on that experience to learn to code, infusing his new knowledge into his teaching, as well as departmental workflows and mentorship of students. These new skills not only strengthen the department and our work with students but also model the values of lifelong learning that are at the core of our mission, values that also make faculty life enriching and dynamic.

One initiative stands out when I think about the ways Dr. Spicer has supported our department. He spearheaded the development of six courses for the REAL program, which would credential high school English teachers to teach dual enrollment College Writing courses. Dr. Spicer’s democratic and collegial approach to departmental initiatives are on full display in this example. From the beginning, he involved me in the design of these courses and worked with all of us in the department to envision the program. He did the yeoman’s work of developing the curricula and moving all courses through faculty governance. I am incredibly excited and proud about this project for two reasons. First, we quickly saw high enrollment in the courses; they are popular and valuable for local teachers and an important source of students for the

English department. Second, these six courses are characterized by deep theoretical literacy and research that makes them highly impactful for the students who take them. In turn, the intellectual richness, cutting-edge content, and careful design of these courses means that they will indirectly shape the learning of many students—most of whom are in the Chicagoland area. It inspires me to think about how local students will understand digital rhetoric, for example, at a deeper level because this REAL program exists. If these students are more canny about online information or the affordances of digital communication, it will be because of Dr. Spicer's thorough and rigorous work to bring this program to life.

Dr. Spicer's dedicated mentorship has immeasurably benefited my career at USF. We have collaborated on the REAL programming as well as the Digital Humanities major, and his leadership of the department is characterized by a similar collaborative ethos. We figure things out together as a department, and this approach has supported me because I have been able to learn about institutional service at an appropriate pace. His classes are beloved by students; he has published multiple articles with students in the past two years. Clearly, Dr. Spicer excels in all areas of our work. He also takes an unassuming approach to leadership, making my path and that of other junior faculty clearer and easier.

I enthusiastically support Dr. Spicer's application for promotion to Full Professor at the University of St. Francis and would gladly continue to sing his praises if further information is requested. I am eternally grateful to have him as a colleague and my department chair, and I could not more strongly support his promotion.

Sincerely,

Anna Ioanes
Assistant Professor of English