



THOMAS MORE
UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HEALTH SCIENCES

Dear Provost Garriga and the Faculty Relations Committee,

This letter represents my support of Dr. Joe Christensen as he seeks full professorship here at Thomas More University. It has been my pleasure to work with Dr. Christensen during my tenure at Thomas More in several different capacities. Dr. Christensen exemplifies all three areas required for full professorship—service, scholarly activity, and teaching. I would like to discuss each separately, though the boundaries between the areas blur in many instances as Dr. Christensen’s holistic efforts on behalf of the students, faculty, and institution itself make this unbraiding tricky!

Service:

Dr. Christensen’s service to the institution is broad and far-reaching. From his work on many different committees to his service as the Associate Provost, Joe has always chosen to put the interests of the institution and students first. I have had the pleasure of serving on several different committees with Dr. Christensen and he always brings a careful, reflective perspective to each—a perspective that seeks to see multiple effects from the decisions made by the committees and a deliberate view on how those consequences affect different constituents. This is particularly true in regards to the students that we ultimately all serve in our positions.

One area that I would like to focus on specifically is Dr. Christensen’s work around the importance of teaching and teaching well to meet the needs of our students. From his service on the QEP and his work on a possible teaching and learning center, to his work with retention and the START committee, Dr. Christensen understands the ways in which teaching—whether formally or informally—leads to better student success on our campus and that it is our job as faculty to look for ways to reach students who are different today than when many of us began this career. His service on these committees allows us all to pause and re-center the importance of students in our positions and reminds us regularly that the reason we are here is because of the students.

Scholarly Activity/Research:

As an institution, we define scholarly activity in several different ways. According to the Halpern model described in the Tenure and Promotion Handbook, there are five areas along six different avenues that count as scholarly activity. Dr. Christensen's scholarship in several areas not only meets these ideals, but also exceeds them.

Dr. Christensen was also able to use his work as director of the QEP around critical thinking to engage himself and his colleagues in what good teaching looks like. This scholarly work included conference presentations around his implementation of different pedagogical techniques in his classes and how to think differently about the Paul-Elder model of critical thinking while improving teaching skills. The purpose of these presentations, beyond applying pedagogical content knowledge—a formal educational research idea known as PCK—was to allow other professors to replicate this work in their own classrooms to improve the teaching and learning that was happening in these spaces. From workshops on our own campus to conferences and invited talks around the Midwest, this work set up Joe's next scholarly work.

In addition to his scholarship on critical thinking and teaching, Dr. Christensen's sabbatical work around a new type of physics textbook is a fabulous example of his scholarly activity that required both a deep level of content knowledge and the ability to integrate that knowledge in a way that meets the needs of both students and other faculty members. In addition to synthesizing physics content and pedagogy, this project also employed the integration of technology. In his efforts to create a truly online textbook, Joe held high expectations for himself and the ways in which he needed to incorporate technology, content, and pedagogy. This led to a preliminary version that is user friendly, innovative, and has the possibility of changing the way we think about online textbooks.

Teaching:

In addition to the above efforts, Dr. Christensen's work in the actual field of teaching has been exceptional. Having students who double major in his field and mine, I have a unique opportunity to hear from students about his efforts in the classroom and how he is taking his scholarship and actively implementing it in his courses. The ability to "walk the talk" around pedagogy is one that is not often present in higher education academics outside of education. Use of demonstrations, thoughtful feedback, and the reflective thinking he shows in committees and applies to the classroom are all a part of his practice. In addition to this, Joe is also willing to put himself out there to learn more. Two years ago, he videotaped himself teaching a class and then allowed the education department to use that video to train pre-

service teachers in observing and assessing teaching. This proved invaluable as a teaching and learning tool for, I believe, both my students and Dr. Christensen.

In addition to the above, Joe and I have taken the opportunity to sit in each other's classes on a fairly regular basis to improve our teaching. Again, the willingness to be open to both critique and peer evaluation makes Dr. Christensen not only a life long learner, but also a professor who strives to improve his craft through not only content, but also pedagogy. These peer reviews were invaluable in my growth as a professor and I hope that they were as helpful to Dr. Christensen.

In conclusion, a full professor is one who should embody the mission of the institution. Dr. Christensen embodies that mission through his teaching, service, and scholarly activities. He models how others should represent that mission, particularly in his scholarship, service, and teaching to improve pedagogy in physics and beyond. It is my honor to support Dr. Christensen in his quest for full professorship.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Kimberly Haverkos".

Kimberly Haverkos, Ph.D.

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