

RE: 2019 CBU Alumni Distinguished Teaching Award

6 June 2019

Dean's letter of support

It is my great pleasure to support Dr Patrick Howard's nomination for the 2019 CBU Alumni Distinguished Teaching Award by highlighting some of his major strengths as a university teacher. In doing so, I will try my best to address each of the ten criteria of distinguished teaching around which the award is framed, and support my claims with reference to concrete examples of his teaching practice (as demonstrated in his teaching portfolio) as well as excerpts from students' comments on his teaching found in course evaluations that I had an opportunity to peruse.

1. Demonstrates knowledge of the teaching and learning process

As will be blatantly clear to anyone having read Patrick's teaching philosophy statement and portfolio, he is a highly experienced, knowledgeable, innovative, reflective, caring, and student-focused teacher, who has made considerable contributions to student learning as well as course and program development. A trained teacher with twenty years of school teaching under his belt, Patrick joined CBU 10 years ago, as associate professor of education, having just completed a PhD in education at the University of Alberta. Since then Patrick has developed and taught no fewer than 11 courses, on campus and online. To mention just a few examples: EDUC 4111: Facilitating a Comprehensive Literacy Program in the Elementary Classroom and EDUC 4107: Assessment for and of Learning at the *Undergraduate* level; EDUC 5126: Assessment in Inquiry Based Science Education at the *Graduate Diploma* level and EDUC 6101: Fundamentals of Sustainability for Educators at the *master's* level (for details on these and further courses he developed please consult his carefully compiled portfolio). Patrick's knowledge of the teaching and learning process, therefore, is grounded in both extensive teaching experience and the formal study of theories of education.

It is important to understand early on that the "students" Patrick teaches are either schoolteachers (involved in further professional development as teachers through our postgraduate or master's level programs) or recent graduates from first degree programs now enrolled in our BEd program with the intent to become certified teachers. As a university teacher, therefore, Patrick is in fact a teacher educator: meaning that he teaches those who want to become (better) teachers! No one more qualified to do this, of course, than someone who is an excellent teacher, knowledgeable of the teaching and learning process! However, in this letter I will provide some further evidence to

support the claim that Patrick is indeed not just an excellent teacher, but an excellent **university** teacher.

What the students say:

“Great pace in the classroom.”

“instructor was professional, respectful, courteous and kind. Material was well organized and presented”

I mention these more general comments as they get at what being knowledgeable in teaching means: it means not just knowing the material-which Patrick of course knows. Being knowledgeable in teaching means knowing HOW TO TEACH. And respect, kindness, having great pace in sharing the material, etc., are all key aspects of great teaching.

2. demonstrates the capacity to arouse learner interest in the subject

Patrick’s teaching has been praised highly at the undergraduate, postgraduate diploma and master’s level. This is not surprising as he skillfully engages students (both those on the BEd (pre-service) and those in the postgraduate courses (so-called ‘in-service’ teachers) in real-life, authentic learning experiences which helps to build confidence and demonstrates how change is possible through leadership. EDUC4151 and 4153: Secondary Methods in English Language Arts I and II demonstrate the type of teaching which he seeks to facilitate in the face to face classroom setting. His goal is to make learning as authentic and linked to practical real-life purposes as possible. In the methods courses students are immersed in the development of actual teacher curriculum resources. Making the case even more concrete, building on the principles of place based learning, Patrick encourages students to develop teacher guides for two locally published YA novels; by doing so he connects student teachers to community and a place for learning that is locally relevant and culturally appropriate. These teacher guides (published by CBU Press) developed by the students are available online for free download to teachers who would like to introduce local literature into their classrooms. Such authentic learning experiences connect the student with the material and arouse interest in the subject.

What the students say:

“Best/most useful course thus far”.

“Lots is useful information”

“This course will help me”

“Patrick kept us engaged”

3. prepares and organizes thoroughly for classes, labs, or tutorials

The previous section has covered this criterion as well. Patrick is always extremely well prepared for his classes. I had the opportunity once to ‘sit in’ in one of his online classes. It

was the first class of the course and he provided an overview of how the course was structured and it became very clear to me how the students appreciated the level of preparedness, organization and clarity of what was expected.

What the students say:

“Course was very well organized with appropriate assignments”

“The course was well organised and presented”

“Always prepared and let us students know what is expected”

4. develops and communicates clearly student learning outcomes, course requirements and pathways to success

Experienced teachers like Patrick perhaps do this routinely. The students however say it best:

“I always felt the class was in good hands as Dr Howard always explains & provides personal stories to aid in content retention”

“Professor Howard set very clear standards of expectations, marking standards, and gave immediate feedback.”

5. challenges students to achieve learning outcomes and to develop critical thinking and problem solving abilities

The key pillars of Patrick’s teaching philosophy are Education for Sustainability and Transformation. Both can be achieved only through transformative pedagogies that make the students reflect critically on their present understandings of the world. As Patrick says so well in his teaching philosophy statement:

“As we are coming to understand more clearly with each passing day, there is really one main goal that should be motivating professionals and those charged with educating professionals. I am most clearly focused on helping teachers prepare for a changing classroom and to develop the competencies required to enable education to make an important contribution to discover how we live well and sustainably on a planet facing daunting challenges”.

And the

“Transformation of what it means to be an educator is necessary because education systems are composed of the people who work within them and a key to changing these systems will

be educators who are able to change their own practice as critical reflective practitioners. The building of positive relationships between educators and learners is essential”

And

“Transformative pedagogy draws on the experience of learners and creates opportunities for participation and for the development of creativity, innovation and the capacity to imagine alternative ways of living”.

By teaching for sustainability and transformation to build a new vision of education that puts our planet and well-being first, he encourages his students to think critically and not just fit into the system.

Education for Sustainability then is more than simply a course title for Patrick: it runs like a red thread through all his teaching. Key here is that Education for Sustainability provides a foundational set of principles that guides his course design and also online instructional strategies. In all his teaching, Patrick aims to model for teachers how learning approaches and teaching strategies can promote deep learning, critical thinking, and problem solving through collaboration.

Students are also encouraged to think critically about the link between online teaching and sustainability: allowing people to learn where they are placed, rather than expecting them to travel, is one of the key benefits of technology, which ultimately helps us to live more sustainably.

6. develops rapport with learners

Dialogue and relationship building are essential aspects of teaching for Patrick. As a teacher he knows that significant learning is most likely to occur if students feel comfortable and safe to exchange their unique viewpoints.

What the students say:

“Patrick is an extremely personable instructor , his knowledge and personality blend together perfectly to make the ultimate learning experience”

“Patrick was very approachable inside and outside of class”

“Patrick has a great flow to his class and is very friendly”

7. uses approaches to teaching and evaluation of learning that respect diverse student learning needs and

8. uses assessment methods that are aligned with learning outcomes and instructional approaches;

I will address these two criteria together. I should note that “assessment of (and for) learning” is a topic that Patrick teaches! However, not only does he understand the thinking behind assessment (teaching an entire course on the subject), he also employs assessment approaches in meaningful ways. It is most helpful to refer to his teaching evaluations directly to get a sense of this.

This is what the students say:

“The assignments were well thought out, varied, and provided a forced opportunity to review and delve into course content”

“Assignments were appropriate”

“Great feedback”

“Patrick handed assignment back quickly”

“Dr Howard creates a classroom environment which allows students to feel safe and confident in contributing and engagement”

“Patrick gave very relevant and useful feedback”

“He as very efficient at returning course work”

“He provided constructive feedback on assignments”

9. encourages student participation in the learning process

It is a key concern for Patrick that the learning environments he provides invite learning through interaction and engagement, while emphasizing personal relationships, dialogue and co-learning. The following comment is typical of student feedback he receives:

“Patrick welcomed questions, concerns and comments”

Participation in the learning process is also encouraged by how he uses technology. Patrick is passionate about online learning and has taught himself how to make use of the most recent advances in ICT and digital media to the benefit of his students’ learning. Software such as Voice Threads, and other software available online and through Office 365, support the teaching of key course concepts through the use of full audio and video. Not only do the students see and hear him, but by incorporating the same technology they too are able to see and hear each other.

By skilfully employing these technologies, Patrick fosters a community of learners, which strengthens relationships among students and their learning experience through participation.

10. “demonstrates reflective teaching”

As for the final criterion, it should be clear that as a professor of education Patrick is engaged in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. The design of the MEd SCI is clearly research-informed meaning that he used research to adapt and develop both his teaching practice and inform course and program development. As illustrated in his teaching portfolio, Patrick also shares good practice with others through workshops, presentations, or publications on teaching and learning, and participates in professional development activities to enhance teaching practice. He is extremely generous with his knowledge, having given several seminars to colleagues in the School of Education and Health (formerly Professional Studies) on how reflectivity, and approaches to stimulate reflectivity, can enhance professional practice. Examples include a seminar on Humans Science Research in Professional Practice in the spring of 2019, an art-based reflection workshop in December 2018 and an Introduction to Reflectivity in Professional Practice also in 2018. While not mentioned in his portfolio, yet further speaks to his generosity, I also add that he has acted informally as a mentor to less experienced colleagues, especially those applying for renewal or promotion.

In summary, Patrick is a university teacher of the highest caliber. He clearly excels on each of the ten criteria around which the Distinguished Teaching Award is framed. His research and teaching inform each other in the most fruitful ways, to the benefit of his students. The strength of our teacher education programs is rooted in the expertise he brings as a teacher.

I cannot think of anyone more deserving of this award and am very happy to support this nomination today.

Please feel free to contact me in case you require any further information or have any questions.

Kind regards,



Carolin Kreber, PhD

Dean, School of Education and Health