



Department of English & Languages  
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Dear Search Committee,

I'm writing this letter as a colleague and friend to recommend Dr. Justiss Burry for the Assistant Professor of English position. This letter will highlight Dr. Burry's success in teaching, as I observed it, through five specific categories: effective instructional skills, content knowledge, clarity of expectations, professionalism, and, finally, enthusiasm, passion, dedication, engagement, effectiveness, and openness in communication.

On October 17<sup>th</sup>, I observed Dr. Burry in ENGL 3309: Professional Writing, which is a face-to-face course. Prepared as usual, Dr. Burry started class on time and had a PowerPoint presentation ready on the projected screen. He began class by fielding student questions about class expectations and incoming assignments. The PowerPoint outlined the ways in which the class's activities for that day would align with the techniques and expectations of a major essay assignment due the next week. Mere minutes into class it was evident—and proven throughout—that Dr. Burry's student's not only respect his expertise, but admire him for his professionalism, warmth, and humor.

Dr. Burry then indicated that the students should get into their groups. Clearly, they had done this before and were comfortable having discussions in small group settings. Using his PowerPoint instructional aid, Dr. Burry set the students on a classroom activity in which they discussed and listed the generic traits of country music. This activity served to help the students analyze not just genre, but discourse around genre, as well as to apply different research types and methods. Practicing these skills in a classroom setting allowed the students to intellectually experiment with rhetorical styles and concepts in a way they would not, perhaps, have the confidence to enact in individual writing. After an appropriate amount of time, Dr. Burry brought the groups together.

To clarify his expectations about the assignment, as well as consolidate the varying viewpoints that each group might hear the other's opinions, Dr. Burry facilitated a large group discussion. He moderated adroitly, inserting his expertise when necessary. Though the students became impassioned, no students became distressed or overwrought. Rather, Dr. Burry was able to weave their passion into the classroom learning environment by acknowledging their points, correcting them kindly when necessary, and using both agreement and disagreement to serve his thesis regarding generic expectations. Finally, he asked the students (with a prompt on the board): "How could you turn this discussion of country music into an academic research question?" After discussion, he presented the next question: "What about an applied research question?" The graduating difficulty of the questions served Dr. Burry well. The students met the challenge, especially after Dr. Burry reminded them that "applied research is contextualized and situated." Armed with further knowledge, they made a new list of expectations, all while Dr. Burry played a few country songs.

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In the last 20 minutes of class, after a few minutes perusing the major paper assignment sheet on the board, Dr. Burry had his students work on a sample exercise from their textbook, with modification: what was the feasibility of building a new dining hall on Tarleton's campus? The students took to the assignment with vigor, it being connected to their own collegiate experience. Dr. Burry moved easily from group to group and answered any and all questions posed to him. At times, he would answer with questions of his own, rephrasing that they might come to their own conclusions

To conclude the day, Dr. Burry asked the students a number of questions related to the day's activities. He patiently waited for students to think and signal, they were ready to answer the questions. His humor seemed to relax the uneasiness some students felt while he encouraged them to think. His relaxed teaching style complemented the evidence of his content knowledge. When he had no volunteers, Dr. Burry would call on students. Rather than feel a sense of resentment or unease, in all cases the students quickly—if, at times, nervously—answered the question. I much admired Dr. Burry's ability to allow students to step out of their comfort zones.

Dr. Burry is a wonderful teacher who brings an enigmatic and dynamic energy to the classroom. During my time in the course, I noticed how engaged students were. Dr. Burry's ability to use the resources of his classroom also dovetailed with the verve of his teaching style. This class is in a computer lab, and several times Dr. Burry had students search concepts, definitions, and the like on their computers. For instance, he had three different students find definitions of ethos, pathos, and logos, then related their definitions to the classroom concept at hand. By making the classroom a space for research and discussion, Dr. Burry proves the effectiveness of his instruction. Overall, the students were engaged in the course, listening, and looking at Dr. Burry instead of their phones or devices, which speaks to his enthusiasm, passion, dedication, engagement, effectiveness, and openness in communication.

Teaching accolades noted, I wanted to take a moment to describe the type of colleague the Department of English would be fortunate to have should Dr. Burry's application move forward. Working with Dr. Burry over the past three semesters at Tarleton State University has been one of the highlights of my time as an Assistant Professor of English. Dr. Burry is involved, kind, hilarious, and mimics wonderful departmental practice as he does in his classrooms—he creates opportunities for community-building and learning.

I thank the committee for their time.

Sincerely,

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