



College of Arts & Sciences

Women's & Gender Studies

Louisiana State University  
238 Himes Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803

O 225-578-4807  
F 225-578-4804  
[www.lsu.edu/wgs](http://www.lsu.edu/wgs)  
[wgs@lsu.edu](mailto:wgs@lsu.edu)

To Whom It May Concern,

I am pleased to have the opportunity to write this letter for Ms. Monica Miller (a PhD candidate in the Department of English and a WGS graduate minor). Ms. Miller teaches two sections of our Introduction to Women's & Gender Studies courses, and so my recommendation is based primarily on my assessment of her teaching, based both on an observation of her class and on her course materials and syllabus.

On October 20, I had the opportunity observe WGS 2500, Introduction Women's & Gender Studies, taught by Ms. Monica Miller. The class meets for about 80 minutes on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, and there are 35 students enrolled.

I will focus generally on my observations of the class as it unfolded. The class time was well organized, with clear objectives identified at the beginning, and a nice balance between covering new material, and linking that material to previous material and to overall themes. Ms. Miller started off the class by providing an overview of a few organizational reminders about the paper, and indicated that she had provided models for the paper and the annotated bibliography on the class webpage. She provided throughout the entire class additional reminders of how the class material would be relevant to these long-term projects. The class then segued into a discussion of the assignment, which was "Even the Queen" short story. Ms. Miller presented a series of well-designed questions to the class which served to encourage the class to discuss the content of the story, the themes and meaning of the story, and (perhaps most important) how the themes are related to previous courses. As students answered, Ms. Miller provided good feedback, clearly recognizing particularly good answers, practicing active listening by rephrasing student points so that the contributions were clearly identified to the other students, and asking the students follow-up questions. She also clearly took advantage of the fact that the students were drawn from many different disciplines, and so the discussion was one in which students were very clearly learning from each other's different perspectives--this would be ideal in any course, but it particularly essential in an interdisciplinary course that serves as part of our general education curriculum.

About 85% percent of the class was present, which strongly suggests that Ms. Miller has succeeded in encouraging her students to develop a commitment to making the investment to learn. In the class, students were very comfortable, and generally attentive, clearly taking notes, following along. I noted as well that Ms. Miller also did a nice job recognizing when the class seemed to be as a group responding (with a bit of laughter, or a chorus of agreement) about a comment or question raised by a

student or by Ms. Miller, and she effectively collectively followed up on those responses. At first, I noted that only two or three individuals were consistently contributing. At about 1/4 the way into the class, the discussion turned from the specifics of the elements of the story to the relevance of the story to the everyday lives, about several more students began joining in the discussion, and the class became even more energized.

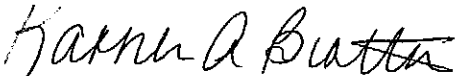
As the class continued, Ms. Miller then steered the conversation to a discussion of the topic of the week, gender identity and construction, as illustrated by two clips she showed from popular culture: Captain Mal in *Firefly* and Ripley in *Alien*. The students remained very attentive, and the mix between the video clips, the visual outlines, and the active discussion was very effective.

As class closed, Ms. Miller linked the discussion of the day to the material that would be covered in the short-term future, as well as to the longer term assignment of the research paper. Immediately following the class, several students came up to her to energetically chat about their work.

I'd like to highlight two points. First, I was very impressed by the degree to which the class discussion that day was linked to larger themes in the class, and to previous discussion in past weeks. The students are clearly encouraged to integrate all of their learning into more general themes. Second, Ms. Miller very effectively kept the students on point, according to a well-developed plan for the session—but at the same time, she fostered an atmosphere of free debate among the students. Often in college classes, even when discussion is lively, it is between instructor and student; in this case, there was a significant amount of discussion among students, and Ms. Miller's guidance of the discussion was subtle but effective. I should also note that the class webpage was extremely very well organized, and the class requirements are well distributed across a number of different ways to measure student knowledge and achievement; a bit over half of the course grade depends on a midterm, a final, and a research paper, and the remaining credit depends on a series of shorter response papers and group projects. It is also clear that Ms. Miller uses the webpage to encourage the students to stay engaged in the course across the semester; indeed, it appeared that most of the students use the webpage daily. She uses a good mix of readings, well balanced in terms of length and topic; the material clearly enhanced student engagement.

In sum, I walked away very impressed with the way in which Ms. Miller organized and conducted her class, and I am very impressed with the overall structure of the course, and the care with which the materials have been selected and the assignments designed. It was very clear that the students were enjoying their collective learning experience—and that isn't surprising, given how much Ms. Miller clearly enjoys teaching. I think Ms. Miller is well on her way to being an outstanding teacher.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.



Dr. Kathleen A. Bratton  
Director, Women's & Gender Studies  
Louisiana State University  
118 Himes Hall  
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
225-578-4807  
[dwgs@lsu.edu](mailto:dwgs@lsu.edu)

11 March 2012

260 L Allen Hall  
University Writing Program (UWP)

Teaching Award Committee  
260 Allen Hall  
LSU

Dear Teaching Award Committee members:

I'm writing in support of Ms. Monica Miller's nomination for the GTA Teaching Award. This spring, I observed Ms. Miller's English 2000 class. On this particular day she was preparing students to cite their sources correctly in MLA style in the writing class. Ms. Miller has very good rapport with her students, and this class was not the easiest class to teach. She herself noted the groups of sorority sisters, golf buddies, and roommates who sat together around the class. These students can be more easily distracted compared to students who are relative strangers to each other. However, Ms. Miller was up to the challenge of keeping the students on task and grounded in the material featured in the class. One way she was able to keep their attention in a nuts-and-bolts lesson was through her dry but very effective sense of humor. Her satire served the purpose of keeping students on their toes.

When she reviewed with students some material from earlier classes on plagiarism and beginnings of citation styles, they responded well. Numerous students were able to answer her questions and not just the two or three strong students as can be typical in some classes. Also, she knew their names and didn't hesitate calling on the quieter ones.

In addition, this teacher used technology well, also mentioning Moodle, where she tends to post various articles and YouTubes of the topics she discusses in class. She spoke cogently of topics more of interest to students and also used material of local interest from our LSU testing center and *The Reveille*, while using websites, the document camera and other media so that students were engaged during the class.

After the first half of the class, Ms. Miller gave students a worksheet on citation, put up a PowerPoint with an example on the first slide and then gave students several minutes to complete the work. They were also allowed to help each other in pairs if they so desired. In spite of this very socially connected group of students and the temptation to discuss the weekend, they stayed pretty much on task throughout this class assignment. Using what they had just learned,

then, they could see how successful they were with the example she gave them. Most students did well and Ms. Miller used the rest of the PowerPoint for various answers, some of which had more than one correct possibility.

Particularly notable for teachers who have not been teaching long was Ms. Miller's sense of timing and pacing. In this area she is also a "pro." Both were perfect and particularly in this class, it was important to keep the instruction and activities moving to keep the students engaged.

Although Ms. Miller was exempted from the practicum the first year she and I were at LSU, she asked to meet with me early on and go over the curriculum. In meeting with and talking to her that first time, and then in several subsequent meetings and informal teaching conversations, it was really clear to me what a creative, smart and capable teacher this was. Some of her approaches to working with various materials in our curriculum were so engaging and creative, I asked her permission to show them to some of the practicum students, because they were so timely. In addition, she has spoken on and made interesting such mundane topics as plagiarism for Dr. Michie's speaker's forum.

Ms. Miller is already an excellent teacher, even though she has only been teaching for several years, and thus is a strong candidate for this honor. I hope we give her serious consideration.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara Heifferon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'B' and a long, sweeping tail.

Barbara Heifferon

UWP Director



October 27, 2013

Dear members of the search committee,

I am writing this letter to provide a peer evaluation of Monica Miller's classroom teaching performance as a part of her application materials. The class I observed was English 2025-Special Topics in Fiction: The Many Souths, a sophomore-level general education course taken by majors and non-majors alike.

Monica started her class with a series of questions about the readings before asking her students to write down and pass forward any question they had about the novel under discussion, Jack Butler's *Jujitsu for Christ*. While this type of feedback might seem pedagogically standard, it was clear to me that Monica's students felt comfortable speaking openly about reading questions, concerns, and frustrations. She asked willing students to share questions with the class before leading discussions about those questions, helping the class understand their own analytical frames and practices. It was clear that Monica's students understand that she expects scholarly discourse, causing her students to rise to the occasion. More importantly, she helps her students understand obstacles as a part of the class discourse by incorporating those questions into her day-to-day schedule.

After helping students move past their initial questions and concerns, Monica expertly led a discussion that addressed the novel's complex narrative techniques as well as the historical context in which the novel is set. An important aspect of Monica's interactions with her students is her light-handed technique. Monica knows when students need contextual information from her and, conversely, when they can talk through issues on their own. For example, Monica allowed students to theorize on a scene in the novel in which a character was based on Medgar Evers before revealing that information. With new information, Monica encouraged a new discussion of the scene. This method helped her students understand the importance of context to reading, specifically in her southern literature class.

Monica extends her ability to manage discussions to reading and writing groups with colleagues. In fact, Monica and I started a Southern Studies reading group at LSU for graduate students and faculty. I have personally benefited from her help in both groups, where she employs many of the same methods I saw in her classroom. I can confidently say she would make an excellent teacher and colleague in any department.

Sincerely,

Matthew Dischinger  
Doctoral Candidate  
Dept. of English, LSU

To whom it may concern:

I have known Mrs. Monica Miller for a little over a year. I was a student in her sophomore level Introduction to Women's and Gender Studies class. During my course, I came to know her very well. Mrs. Miller is a hard-working, caring and creative teacher. It was a pleasure to be in her class.

Throughout my time in her class, Mrs. Miller gave various lectures and assignments that widened my view and understanding of the world. She was patient with her students and presented the information in a way that was fun and interesting to learn.

An important aspect of Mrs. Miller's interactions with students is her genuine interest in their work. Mrs. Miller inspired and motivated me to work harder and more diligently than I ever had before. One of the last assignments she gave was to write an eight page paper, on a subject of our choice, from a feminist perspective. On the last day of class as I was walking out the door, she pulled me aside. She told me how she had enjoyed reading my paper and that she had actually learned something. I cannot explain to you how amazing that simple sentence made me feel. As I walked out of Mrs. Miller's class for the last time, I did so with a newly appreciated pride in my work.

Mrs. Miller is a truly amazing and inspiring teacher. I personally have benefited greatly from taking her class and sincerely hope that her efforts as a teacher and adviser will be rewarded. Please let me know if you have any questions or if I can provide any further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Blake L. Hickman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Blake L. Hickman

October 25, 2011

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter to support Mrs. Monica Miller's nomination for the LSU Alumni Award for Teaching. I sincerely believe she is deserving of this honor.

I am a junior Biology major at LSU, and took Dr. Miller's English 2000 class last spring. Being a science major, I was not looking forward to any classes that were not related to my major, but I was pleasantly surprised after just one day in Dr. Miller's class. From the start, I could tell she was a gifted teacher and an excellent communicator. Most importantly, I could see that she knew how to motivate students to excel.

The first half of the class was mostly writing practice and Mrs. Miller generally gave us assignments which stressed critical thinking, a skill that I think many teachers neglect. Daily writing assignments kept the lesson material fresh in our minds. Mrs. Miller always returned our assignments with a great deal of constructive criticism. Not only did she point out weaknesses and errors, but she also offered suggestions for improvement and praised our writing strengths. It was clear that her comments and feedback were individualized for each student. This teaching style had a way of boosting a student's confidence and motivating him or her to work harder on the next project.

In the second half of the course, we began working on our researched position paper. Mrs. Miller allowed us to choose our topic as long as it was pertinent to our major or to an on campus issue. I was especially happy about this because I was able to not only develop my writing skills, but also my knowledge of a scientific topic that was interesting and important to me. Even if we were not outstanding writers in matters of style and technique, Mrs. Miller gave us a chance to shine as far as content is concerned.

Mrs. Miller's class was the most enjoyable English course I have ever taken. She is an insightful lecturer, making material understandable and encouraging students to participate by providing their own insights. She is approachable and always willing to rearrange her office hours to meet with students one-on-one. The most important thing that Mrs. Miller did for me was instill confidence in my writing abilities. I learned that I could develop my own style and learn from my mistakes.

Mrs. Miller was a mentor to me and to all of her students. I highly recommend her for the LSU Alumni Award for Teaching.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alex Kleinpeter", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Alex Kleinpeter

## **SUPPORT LETTER FOR PROFESSOR MONICA MILLER**

To Whom It May Concern,

I had the privilege of taking Professor Miller's English 2000: English Composition class during the spring semester of 2011. Throughout my five months in Miller's class, I feel as if my writing drastically improved. Miller not only helped my writing improve, but she also taught certain aspects of English that will greatly benefit me in the long run. I now feel like I have an overall better view of English Composition as I enter the world of writing.

Professor Miller is a kind, caring professor who wants nothing but the best for her students. Whenever I or one of my fellow classmates had a question, Miller always had an answer that summed it up perfectly. One of the aspects of the class that truly helped me was our one-on-one required meetings each student had with her before a major essay was due. During these meetings, students would present their essay draft and Miller would look over it to let one know if they are heading in the right direction. Miller always provided helpful information that allowed me to go back and review my writing to see where I can improve. It was these helpful hints that allowed me to realize how much Miller truly cares about my writing and wants to see the absolute best out of each student.

Professor Miller was also one of the most organized, prepared professors that I have had during my time at LSU. Each class period began with a writing topic on the board that the class would further discuss. Miller always provided lectures that allowed me to gain an overall better insight to whatever the topic discussion was focused on. Miller always reminded the class to either email or come see her during her office hours if anyone had any questions. Miller was always receptive to emails that I sent her with questions that I had.



I personally have greatly benefitted by having Miller as one of my professors. Miller's care to see her students succeed at the highest level is something that I will always remember. I hope that her teaching efforts will be rewarded by receiving a much-deserved teaching award.

Sincerely,

Andrew Strauss