August 5, 2021

Dear Selection Committee

I enthusiastically nominate Dr. Monica Janzen for the 2021 APA Prize for Excellence in Philosophy Teaching. I cannot think of a more deserving person for this prize. I met Monica (Mo) 21 years ago in graduate school. Since finishing graduate school, we have taught in different states at very different institutions. And yet, together, we did conference presentations, applied for grants, co-authored papers, created a philosophy website, and developed new teaching materials. I know her work really well, and I am extremely happy to nominate her for this award.

Mo has been teaching full time as a regular faculty member at Anoka Ramsey Community College since 2015; before that she served as an adjunct faculty, teaching for 8 years at Hennepin Technical College. At Anoka Ramsey she usually teaches five classes each semester. In addition, she teaches two or three courses each summer, all online. Although she has multiple classes to prepare and about 200 students every single semester, she never has any teaching assistants or graders whatsoever.

In addition to this high teaching load, she serves a very diverse student population. Some students go to her community college to save money--they know what they want and are motivated to get it. But many students go to her community college because they are not particularly motivated, they have learning difficulties, or they struggle with physical or mental health problems. They thus need more support, encouragement, and guidance.

In spite of her heavy teaching load, Mo is always trying to develop new ways to help her students, going above and beyond what is required. Mo’s approach to philosophy draws in students so they see how philosophy is helpful to their lives. She is good at helping students connect philosophy to their lived experiences. Mo recognizes that her students come from very diverse backgrounds and have varied skills, and she meets them where they are. This requires more effort as she has to accommodate a range of experiences and determine how each student can meet the course requirements in their own way. Even during the pandemic, she continued to give students personal attention. In the Spring of 2021, one student in an online class wrote, “Mo is a gem. The readings were incredibly in depth and often felt daunting and as though I couldn’t really understand what the concept was. But, then I would go to the video lecture and Mo is so engaging and passionate and makes incredibly detailed ethical theories clear and concise and easy to absorb. For her passion to be conveyed through a digital lecture is incredibly rare ... Mo repeatedly reminded us that
her job was to help us learn, not just give us assignments and grade us on exams. She wanted us to truly understand the information and was always encouraging us to reach out for clarification, further discussion, and help when we needed. Mo as a professor isn’t content with just having you attend her class, she works hard to get you to engage as a student and I really appreciated it. Mo is also wicked fast at grading assignments and getting feedback incredibly quickly. I have truly appreciated her promptness and it made me feel valued as a student.”

These types of student comments are common for Mo. In fact, students chose her as the ARCC (Anoka Ramsey Community College) Bronze Chalk Award for 2019-2020 and the ARCC Silver Chalk Award 2018-2019. (Due to the pandemic, no award was given last year.) Her Dean has also praised her. In his evaluation of her, he wrote, “Prof. Janzen strikes a wonderful balance between rigor and supportiveness, inviting students into the learning process without lowering expectations...There’s a joy and passion in Prof. Mo Janzen’s teaching that both models and inspires the transformative potential of the learning process.”

As her students often note, Mo’s classes are philosophically rigorous. Yet, Mo is not just focusing on students understanding standard philosophical texts. She is also trying to get them to see the connection between their personal struggles and standard philosophical texts. Furthermore, she tries to develop skills in her students that will be useful for the rest of their lives. Skills such as independent and critical thinking skills; the ability to participate in civil dialogue; and attitudes that include empathy, motivated engagement and recognizing one’s own agency as a change-maker (Mo actually did assessment on her classes to prove that her students actually gain these skills).

To achieve the goal of connecting theory and practice, and helping students develop useful skills, Mo and I started using civic engagement (CE) projects in our classes over 14 years ago. Over time, these projects changed to respond to feedback from students, our observations, and assessment studies we conducted. While the CE project was initially my idea, Mo was crucial to improving and transforming them, making the civic engagement projects what they are today. Furthermore, she used these projects in over 40 classes in seated, online classes, synchronous, and hybrid classes. She came up with the idea of calling this CE project “Experiments in Ethics,” inspired by the model of doing experiments in the sciences. This “Experiments in Ethics” civic engagement project consists of small scale, interrelated assignments or “experiments” that spread the work throughout the semester. The first experiments are easier to complete and involve us providing scaffolding. For example, students write a letter to someone asking them to make a change. As students develop skills and attitudes, we provide less direction and require more agency on behalf of
the students. The last experiment asks students to “Organize an Activity” in which they design their own change-making activity.

Mo does not rely on her intuition about the effectiveness of these projects. She has done extensive research and assessment. Furthermore, she has shared her results with other philosophers by publishing her results. Her research was published in two venues. Her article, “Cultivating Citizenship: Student-Initiated Civic Engagement Projects in Philosophy Classes” (coauthored with Hawthorne, Ilea, and Wiener) was published in *Experiential Learning in Philosophy*. And her article “Scaffolding Civic Engagement Projects: A Study into the Effectiveness of Supported Small Scale, Independent, Student-Designed Projects” (coauthored with Ford) was published in *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching and Learning Journal*.

Mo didn’t stop here. She wanted to find ways to create a community of philosophers who can share teaching strategies and learn from each other. Together with Susan Hawthorne, Mo and I created a website: www.EngagedPhilosophy.com with the help of a grant from the American Philosophical Association. This website provides specific examples from past students to nurture student hope that they too can complete a CE project. Students can then access these examples and see for themselves the work others have completed. What was once an unimaginable or daunting project becomes possible. This is especially important for her students, who often struggle with significant personal issues and who have a hard time seeing themselves as change agents who can complete big projects.

The www.EngagedPhilosophy.com website (funded with a grant from the APA) has 3 main purposes:

1. To showcase change making projects that students have completed and use these projects to help students do better work (as mentioned above).

2. To help share resources for other professors interested in using these change making projects in their classes. The website highlights a variety of student projects that are searchable by topic. In addition, other faculty can find syllabi, assignment guidelines, grading forms, frequently asked questions, links to related publications, student testimonials, and more. The website lets others use these resources in their classes. This is especially useful to others because the Experiments in Ethics should be conceived as an “a la carte” menu. Different instructors can use different experiments depending on their teaching context (for the type of institution at which they teach and their class sizes), the content they cover, their pedagogical goals, or a desire to cultivate or hone a particular skill in their students. Many other professors have used this CE project or adapted it to fit their needs. Other professors from community colleges and other teaching-focused institutions are particularly inspired by Mo’s work. I have met people at conferences that acted like Mo
was a superstar, and were awe-struck meeting her in person or even just hearing that I know her personally.

3. To interview other philosophers who a) engage in their own academic or activist work promoting civic engagement, social justice, or sustainability or b) work with students on activist projects. The website currently includes more than fifty interviews.

Mo has been active in the profession in other ways too. In addition to the publications that I mentioned earlier, she published an article titled “Student Activism” (coauthored with me) in *College Ethics*, ed. Bob Fischer, second edition, Oxford University Press, 2020. She has presented at numerous conferences on civic engagement in philosophy (including a number of presentations at the APA, AAPT, and Public Philosophy conferences) and on SOTL (the scholarship of teaching and learning). She also had the honor of being selected to teach a course for new faculty at the State of Minnesota system of colleges and universities this fall on faculty development.

Mo is also very active in the AAPT because she is deeply committed to furthering the discipline of philosophy. She is an At Large Board Member of the AAPT and she serves on the editorial board for the *AAPT Studies in Pedagogy* and the Teaching and Learning Committee. She also just completed training to be an AAPT facilitator for its Teaching Seminar for graduate students and regional workshops.

In addition to her many contributions to the discipline, Mo is also very active in her college on teaching projects and faculty development. In fact, her college has recognized her with the ARCC Honored Faculty for 2019-2020—an award given by her campus’ chapter of the Minnesota State College Faculty Union to a single faculty member. She was the co-chair of URSCA (undergraduate research scholarship and creative activities) and the Chair of her college-wide Faculty Development Committee. In the latter role, she planned 3 separate development days each year, planned weekly college hours for faculty to continue to engage in professional development opportunities, and was in charge of distributing funds for Faculty development, managing a budget of over $50,000.

She is also a leader on campus working on inclusion, equity, and diversity initiatives. She organized an ad hoc group to respond to the murder of Daunte Wright near her campus and hosted a joint Faculty/Staff book club on *How to be an Antiracist*. She helped on the state level by serving as the Teach Together Minnesota Discipline Lead at the Minnesota State Conference on Equity and Inclusion in Online Teaching just this past May. Mo has also volunteered as an Ethics Bowl coach at a local high school, where over 70% of students are on the free or reduced lunch program.
Mo’s teaching, scholarship, and service are all driven by her commitment to students. For the past 21 years since I first met her, I have been constantly struck by how she is able to tailor her teaching to each student’s particular needs, skills and experience. Others go to her for advice and guidance often, and she is always attentive and encouraging. I have also learned so much from her about how to approach non-majors and students from disadvantaged backgrounds. I’m also constantly impressed by her creativity, ability to innovate, and willingness to challenge herself. Although her students and colleagues love her, she is never content to just keep doing the same thing. She attends teaching conferences and workshops, she learns from others’ ideas, and rethinks her teaching strategies. I honestly do not know how she does all this while teaching 200 students every semester without any graders or teaching assistants. Her talent, passion, effort, and commitment to students set her apart. I cannot think of anyone I know who is more fully deserving of this award.

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