May 17, 2020

Nomination for the Prize for Excellence in Philosophy Teaching, sponsored by the American Philosophical Association (APA), the American Association of Philosophy Teachers (AAPT), and the Teaching Philosophy Association (TPA)

Dear Members of the Selection Committees:

No semester has brought out the best (and worst) in teaching and learning than the pandemic disrupted one many of us are just now seeing the end of. The person I am nominating, Russell Marcus, to no one’s surprise at Hamilton, has not just risen to the occasion but surpassed even the highest expectations of what we can do in the classroom, virtual or otherwise, all while being exquisitely sensitive to the changing needs of his students, scattered all over the world, and operating out of a huge range of tech, financial, and family circumstances. He combined the best that tech has to offer to deliver as close to possible the quality of instruction he usually demands of himself: he used by asynchronous and live lectures (though he rarely lectures so much as talks to his class about how to work together on the material). They did not cover all the material he’d have done in a regular semester, but both of his classes (a seminar on Wittgenstein) and a 35 person gateway-to-the-major History of Modern Western Philosophy. He is tireless!

Russell was as prepared as anyone: he pivots when needed and regardless of the amount of work it takes him to get the course work right. He has been a leader at Hamilton on developing Team Based Learning, not only transforming all of his courses to thus innovate, but also pushing and prodding as needed for years to get a few classrooms set up for TBL. He has also done (at least) two faculty information sessions explaining the model and, of course, modeling it with us as the students. One thing I know: any time that he buys back from not preparing standard old lectures is completely outstripped by the time he’s spent setting up and revising the TBL material and constantly monitoring students’ work in his courses by having everyone answer one of three exit questions after every meeting. (These questions also serve as attendance checks, calling for careful daily attention to them before they get away from you! (I speak from experience.)) He is an innovator par excellence!

And speaking of innovation: Russell was the main driving force behind a unique philosophy summer program Hamilton ran in 2018, 2019 (and, sadly, though it had been all set to run in 2020, had to be cancelled): Hamilton College Summer Program in Philosophy (HCSPiP). This program not only brought together a fantastic cohort of 20 super engaged undergraduate philosophy students from around the world for an intensive two weeks of study together in three subject areas with three instructors also chosen from among applicants from all over the world, but the hallmark of the courses was pedagogical creativity on the part of the instructors. You can read more about the program here: https://academics.hamilton.edu/philosophysummerschool He is a visionary!
Russell’s teaching range is also impressive, from introductory courses in infinity to seminars on intuitions, with intermediate courses on Descartes and Modern Philosophy. His true love is philosophy of mathematics, and his course on symbolic logic is always bursting at the seams. His approach to Symbo, as we call it, proved so successful at Hamilton, that Russell put together a text book based on it: *Introduction to Formal Logic with Philosophical Applications*, published by OUP and now in its second edition. He is a wonk and a mensch!

Finally, Russell cares deeply about his students and their intellectual growth. He unfailingly treats them with respect, demands their best work, and moves mountains to make it possible. He is beloved!

Sincerely,

Katheryn Doran
Chair, Philosophy
General Director, Hamilton College Program in New York City