To: Distinguished Teaching Award Committee, Provost’s Office

From:

Re: Nomination of Prof.

With great pleasure I write in support of the Distinguished Teaching Award nomination of my colleague, Dr. , Assistant Professor of Italian Renaissance Art, by four doctoral students in the History of Art Department. It is a testament to Prof. outstanding teaching that these graduate students are some of the department’s very best. They have excelled academically, thanks in large part to Prof. courses, and have excelled as GTAs, thanks in large part to her mentoring. Prof. teaching embodies several unique strengths at both the undergraduate and graduate levels for which excellence and innovation serve as the foundation.

Prof. teaches extremely well the full range of courses in our department: the year-long introduction to Art History for mostly freshmen; several upper-level undergraduate lecture courses from the later Middle Ages through the Baroque period (c. 1250-1800); and specialized graduate seminars and directed readings courses on the history of Italian Renaissance art. Such breadth is especially noteworthy because several faculty members in our department teach neither the year-long introductory course nor outside their own art-historical specialization. That Prof. does both -- and with excellent pedagogical approaches and a deep and broad knowledge base -- testifies to her outstanding teaching contributions to the department and to the university.

Quality of Intellectual Content:
Prof. approach to teaching the intellectual content of the History of Art, like her scholarly work, is interdisciplinary. While she addresses traditional issues of artistic style and content, each of her classes is also designed to trace important chronological and thematic trends and functions. Students emerge with an in-depth understanding not only of the aesthetic aspects of art, but also of the political, economic, literary, religious, and gender-related conditions and events, and ritual dynamics that led to their production. Such a pedagogical and scholarly approach is very appropriate for our curriculum, the institution, and the professional discipline of Art History. Prof. commitment to the importance of interdisciplinary inquiry may be best exemplified by the graduate seminar on Buddhist and Christian relics, shrines, and reliquaries (containers for relics) that she co-taught in the spring 2005 with our colleague, Prof. , a specialist in Japanese art. The very large enrollment of 22 graduate students that the seminar drew attests to its strong interdisciplinary and scholarly appeal, and to Prof. reputation as an outstanding teacher.
Based on my review of her course syllabi, assignments, examples of a range of critiqued drafts and finished student papers, my in-class observation of her teaching, and a review of all of her student evaluations, I can attest to the fact that Prof. provides impressive intellectual coherence to the content of all of her courses. She articulates well the intellectual goals for her students in her syllabi and in her in-class contact with them. Those intellectual goals are congruent with the course content and mission. For introductory courses Prof. focuses on the rudiments of art historical discourse, that is, key vocabulary and the tools for critical evaluation and discussion of the aesthetic and contextual meaning of works of art from a broad chronological period. Upper-level classes delve into more sophisticated issues concerning the history, interpretation, and theory of art. Students are given opportunities to respond to a variety of art historical research and interpretive methodologies in class discussions, on exams, and in writing assignments. In Prof. upper-level undergraduate and graduate courses, she engages the students in the examination and critical evaluation of primary research resources, such as contemporary documents; new discoveries, such as, uncovered archival sources or recent restorations; and current trends in art-historical scholarship, such as, feminist approaches to the history of women and domestic art.

Quality of Teaching Practices:
In and out of the classroom, Prof. contact time with students, which she takes very seriously, is well-organized and her plans are carried out. The goals of each of her courses are always clearly articulated in her syllabi, on Blackboard, and in the information that she provides in class. For classes at the 100-500 levels, she prepares a weekly list of art works and terms for which the students are responsible on exams. Students access these sheets before class in order to facilitate discussion.

In order to enhance student learning, Prof. actively engages even her largest classes of 250 students by enthusiastically encouraging discussion about the lecture material and the related daily-assigned readings that they have completed from their text, or from other sources. Thus, both in preparation for class and in class, students are actively engaged in the course material. As a result, students retain and learn more, and appreciate that their class presence and participation make a significant difference in how they perform on graded assignments.

In all of her classes, Prof. describes her own experiences of the works of art in their original contexts — an approach that makes the material more meaningful, and actively engages her students in learning. After more than a decade of teaching on-site in Italy for the Syracuse University Florence program, Prof. understands the importance of access to museum collections, and she arranges visits to, and assigns writing assignments based on, works of art in local and regional collections, such as the KU Wilcox Classical Museum, the Spencer Research Library, the Spencer Museum of Art, and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City. In the same spirit of accessing diverse and rich pedagogical resources in and out of her classroom, Prof. also invites guest lecturers to her classes, such as Prof. from the Department of Architecture and Urban Design, who is an expert on the Italian Renaissance painter and architect Baldassare Peruzzi, and Prof. from the Department of Music and Dance, who lectured about Italian Baroque music.
In order to significantly improve students' learning, Prof. also uses technology in particularly creative and effective ways in contact time with them. Through the medium of PowerPoint she includes text with her images and incorporates more details of works of art than would be possible with 35mm slides. She also goes online during classes to show students how to find electronic course reserves; locate digital images posted online that they can use for study purposes; and access information about museum collections and recent exhibitions. In so doing, Prof. encourages her students to practice the skills outside of class that are embedded in the course goals. A particularly impressive use of online resources as pedagogical tools occurred this semester in Prof. graduate seminar on "Fifteenth-Century Medici Patronage." Prof. accessed the entire early Medici archive (MAP-Medici Avanti il Principato), which the Florentine State Archives have made available online. As the students in the graduate seminar discussed the history of the Medici bank, the building of the Medici fortune, and the early inventories of the first Medici palace, Prof. actually showed the students the Medici bank books (libri segreti) and the 1418 palace inventory, among other documents, and she discussed with them issues of Italian paleography.

Quality of Student Understanding:
Prof. employs effective uses of contact time, course structure, and procedures that contribute especially to the likely achievement of understanding by students. The performance asked of students is appropriate for the course goals, for the level of each course, and for the institution. The performance requested includes challenging levels of conceptual understanding and critical evaluation of the material appropriate to the level of the course and of the students. For example, Prof. organizes each of her lectures around a specific reading assignment. Thus, students are able to integrate what they have read with lecture material, and, therefore, better understand and retain both. She implements a variety of ways in which students provide feedback regarding their understanding of the assigned reading. Sometimes students complete the reading and respond with a question for discussion that they hand in at the beginning of class. Other times, Prof. begins class by asking students to respond to a question posed by her related to the reading assignment. During the current semester, Prof. intends to experiment by dividing up the class into small groups and designating discussion leaders to help initiate discussion. Additionally, in 500-level classes, Prof. assigns one short paper in which students critically assess a particularly challenging reading assignment. All such assignments, which are intended to better integrate readings and inspire discussion, constitute an appropriate percentage of each student's course grade.

There are other ways in which Prof. provides challenging levels of conceptual understanding and critical evaluation of the material appropriate to the level of her courses and of her students. She regularly emphasizes the importance of first-hand experience with works of art and architecture by taking advantage of the collections of the Spencer Museum of Art and the urban fabric of Lawrence. Experiencing works of art in person effectively uses contact time that contributes to student understanding. In the introductory courses, for example, Prof. assigns two papers that allow her students to learn first the rudimentary skills of visual analysis with the focus on one art object in the Spencer Museum, and to build upon those skills by next writing a short paper that relates a building in Lawrence (e.g. Liberty Hall, the Masonic Temple, the Carnegie Library) to the architectural traditions they have learned about in class, their discussion sections, and their readings. Towards the end of each semester in Prof.
500-level classes, students write short papers on a work of art in the Spencer Museum related to the subject of their class (Fifteenth-Century Italian Renaissance Art, Sixteenth-Century Italian Renaissance Art, or Southern Baroque Art) in which they analyze and contextualize that work according to what they have learned over the course of the semester. During the last week of the semester, 500-level classes visit the museum again, and with Prof. ... discuss the works of art about which they have written.

Further, to ensure the quality of student understanding, Prof. ... also makes Art History relevant for students of all levels and interests by bringing current events into the classroom. For example, this semester she began her “Sixteenth-Century Italian Renaissance Art” class with an account of the dramatic recovery of Benvenuto Cellini’s Salt Cellar, which, in 2003, had been stolen from the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Last spring, following the death of Pope John Paul II, she devoted twenty minutes to a discussion of the history of papal burials and elections, and how the seventeenth-century works, which were discussed in class, were designed to serve as a stage for the events that were unfolding each evening on the televised news. In the past, Prof. ... also incorporated discussion of other current events, such as issues in restoration related to works such as Leonardo’s Last Supper, Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel Ceiling, or Lorenzo Ghiberti’s Gates of Paradise, and the sacking of the Baghdad art museum shortly after the Iraq invasion.

In all of her lecture courses, Prof. ... employs a grading formula and varied assignments that are designed to reflect the relative importance of course goals, to challenge students in different ways, and, thus, to ensure student understanding. In both her introductory and upper-level lecture courses, she expects her students to make the appropriate connections between the themes, materials, techniques, ideas, and styles discussed throughout the course. Prof. instructs her students as they study each work for their exams to ask themselves the following probing questions: 1.) What material was used to make this work and what kind of impact does the nature of that material have on its appearance and meaning? 2.) In what kind of setting was this work displayed (a tomb? a temple? a home or palace? etc.), and how did its function affect its meaning, subject, and style? 3.) What are the work’s most important stylistic characteristics and what do those characteristics say about where and when it was produced? 4.) With what other works can it be compared and why? That is, how does this particular object/monument relate to those that came before it? Those that came after it? How does it borrow from previous works? What new features distinguish it from earlier works? Each time Prof. ... teaches a course, she varies the works of art that she covers in order to keep herself fresh and engaged.

Grades on individual assignments in Prof. ... courses hold the percentage of the semester grade commensurate with the emphasis placed upon them in the course goals, and offer students a wide range of ways in which they may demonstrate their understanding. The introduction to art history course offers one example in which she requires: three 50-minute exams (20% each); two short writing assignments (15%); and participation in weekly discussion sections (25%). Exams consist of a combination of multiple choice, fill-in-the-black, slide identifications, term definitions, short answer, diagram labeling, slide comparisons, and essays. Prof. ... appropriately relies mostly on short-answer questions and essay slide comparisons to evaluate student understanding of the material. Students are trained to write about and discuss art in their discussion sections, where they are often given practice
comparisons, and asked to come up with possible exam questions in order to facilitate their learning process.

Summarizing the evidence of reflective consideration and development:
Prof. reflection about her teaching at all levels is embodied in her statement: “I constantly think about my classes, how I might improve them, and what I need to do when faced with new challenges.” In several ways, she has demonstrated reflective consideration and development of her teaching to which she is inspirationally dedicated. Highly sensitive to the level of her students’ understanding, Prof. has changed teaching practices based on past teaching experiences.

Prof. reflective consideration of student performance has most affected her teaching of the year-long introduction to art history course. Like other History of Art Faculty, Prof. has observed that many incoming freshmen have experienced increasing difficulties in processing information in lectures, reading assignments, and in discussion sections. Many cannot develop their own theses and conclusions about what works of art mean and how they relate to each other. As a result, Prof. now devotes more attention in her lectures to how students should approach each work, and what kinds of issues they should focus upon when reading and studying for exams. She works with her GTAs to ensure that more attention is paid in discussion sections to study practices and strategies, which will help students succeed in the course. As a result of the challenges faced in teaching the year-long introduction to art history, Prof. has increasingly taken advantage of the programs offered at the Center for Teaching Excellence.

Since joining the KU faculty four years ago, Prof. has also demonstrated reflection, development, and creativity in her significant revamping of the Italian Renaissance curriculum so that the courses meet the needs of students at all levels and abilities, and allow for even more specialized and sophisticated assignments and discussions in the upper-level classes. Her CUSA-approved curricular changes will take effect beginning in the 2006-07 academic year. They include updating the course descriptions for HA 527: Late Medieval Art in Italy and HA 577: Southern Baroque Art; creating a new mid-level undergraduate survey of Italian Renaissance Art (HA 330) that will include GTA-led discussion sections, and will provide more opportunities for museum visits and critical writing assignments; revising HA 530 so that it now focuses exclusively on fifteenth-century Italian Renaissance art; and creating a new course, HA 531: Sixteenth-Century Italian Renaissance Art. By making her 500-level classes more chronologically specialized, she is now able to delve into subjects, such as Italian Renaissance domestic art and theory, which she was previously unable to cover adequately.

In sum, every aspect of Prof. outstanding teaching – her syllabi; her lectures; her seminars; her assignments; her critical, written responses to students’ work – reflects the integral and meaningful relationship between how and what she teaches, and how her students perform and learn. She does not lecture to her students, but rather has created a learning partnership with them. Thus, with enormous respect and appreciation I enthusiastically support Prof. nomination for a Distinguished Teaching Award.