

February 7, 2022

Dear OIC Neisser, Provost Bergeron, and Dean Galbraith,

I'm writing in enthusiastic support of Michael Popovic's application for tenure and promotion to senior lecturer. It is beyond controversy that Professor Popovic has significantly exceeded the criteria for continuing appointment in each of the categories of mastery of subject matter, effectiveness in teaching, scholarly ability, effectiveness of university service, and continuing growth. As a result, there's simply no way that any one person could speak to all of his accomplishments. Given the specific and extensive collaboration that Professor Popovic and I have engaged in together, I will focus on the areas of teaching, service, and continuing growth. In particular, I write as the colleague who has worked most closely with him in his roles as Coordinator of the Days of Reflection and of the First-Year Connect program (1YC), as well as an advisor for the Potsdam Diversity Ambassadors & Mentors (PDAM). From this work, I can confidently say that, even as somebody who received a Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Faculty Service, Professor Popovic serves his campus community in ways I simply have never seen before. In what follows, I'd like to give brief illustrations of some of Professor Popovic's strengths which lead me to make these claims.

Given the importance of DEI to the success of the campus and the woefully-limited resources devoted to DEI on the campus, Professor Popovic's service here is undoubtedly his most important. Given the high-profile nature of the Days of Reflection and the fact that it attracted thousands of students, faculty, staff, and community members over the five years it existed, I will begin with Professor Popovic's work as Coordinator for this week-long series of events dedicated to race, ethnicity, and culture aimed at helping our campus move towards greater racial equity and justice. As one of the former chairs and the only person to serve on the steering committee every semester of its existence, I can say with confidence that the Days of Reflection ran best under Professor Popovic's leadership. Among other accomplishments, his tenure saw:

1. (i) the establishment of a pre-presentation process where students meet with presenters to discuss their content and get feedback prior to the actual Days of Reflection,
2. (ii) a standardization of times and location for Days of Reflection events in order to ensure maximum attendance, and
3. (iii) the most diverse group of presenters with respect to race, gender, and sexual orientation in the ten semesters of the existence of the Days of Reflection.

Whereas the best way I can speak to Professor Popovic's accomplishments as Days of Reflection coordinator is in relation to others, the best way I can speak to his accomplishments with respect to the 1YC program is by pointing out that nobody else on campus could have brought this here. I have seen Professor Popovic work with students in the Soliya International Connect program for years, I have met with him and Soliya administrators in New York City, and I served on the advisory committee for the 1YC program once it was brought to campus. Without his unfailing commitment, expertise, social capital, and leadership, we simply would not have gotten this opportunity. If you believe, as I do, that the 1YC program is essential to the directions our campus is heading, then you must believe Professor Popovic's tenure and promotion are essential to the directions our campus is heading as well.

Not only has Professor Popovic's service work been essential in providing opportunities for students and community members to learn about and work toward an equitable and inclusive community while on campus, it has also been essential in training students for such opportunities once they graduate. In particular, he was part of the advisory committee for PDAM, a program started for students on campus with a \$208,000 grant awarded by SUNY ODEI. From the beginning, PDAM's goals were:

1. To provide diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) leadership trainings for selected/eligible students; and ensure participants utilize knowledge gained to improve on the College's campus climate for diversity.
2. To provide mentoring skills to selected/eligible students; and ensure they serve effectively as mentors to diverse student populations
3. To provide employment/leadership opportunities to program participants; so they are better prepared for the workforce and global diversity perspectives."

Such service is so central to Professor Popovic's being and he has excelled at it so much that he has done research on it as well. He presented at the 2019 SUNY ODEI conference on what it takes to make something like the Days of Reflection happen on campus. He also presented at a conference at TCCC in February 2020 on dialogue in relation to issues of gender and sexuality. This reveals what is perhaps Professor Popovic's greatest strength—his ability to move from the theoretical and abstract to the practical and applied to maximize student well-being. All too often, I work with educators who cannot perform this balancing act and rely far too much on one side or the other.

With Professor Popovic's role as an educator mentioned, I would be remiss to not discuss his amazing success as a teacher. No doubt, you will see a great deal of evidence for this in the rest of his file—through many awards, impeccable student evaluations, and Professor Popovic's own reflections. I simply want to add to this chorus that Professor Popovic is a teacher like no other. He has guest lectured in my classes a couple dozen times over the last decade. This includes my course for exploratory students which has 8-10 guest lectures from faculty each iteration. His ability to bring out authentic dialogue from students on controversial issues while keeping the space inclusive of students from all backgrounds is simply uncanny. At a teaching-centered campus, Professor Popovic should be one of our models.

Finally, perhaps the greatest experiences I've had working with Michael have not been through formal committees and assignments. Rather, they came from his genuine commitment to continued growth and those days where I'd be working on a seemingly intractable issue or big picture matter and I'd call Michael to say, "Hey, do you have some time to talk things through with me?" or when he would do the same. He is one of the people I trusted to do this with most because, even when we disagree, I can always rely on Michael providing his frank and honest opinion, one that I can be sure is coming from a smart person, who wants to do good for people, and will always work hard at achieving that. It's not easy to come by reliably honest, smart, good, and committed people. Any community I'm aware of could stand to have more.

For these and many other reasons, I recommend Michael Popovic for both continuing appointment and promotion in rank without any reservation whatsoever. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you'd like to talk about his many qualifications and accomplishments in any more detail.

Sincerely,

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