

January 19, 2022

To whom it may concern:

I am writing in extremely strong support of Michael Popovic's application for continuing appointment at SUNY Potsdam. Michael is an incredible asset to SUNY Potsdam, its students, faculty and staff alike. The efforts he's made in improving issues of diversity on our campus, supporting students of the LGBT+ community, and faculty with anti-racist dialogue groups is unparalleled. I have known Michael since I began at SUNY Potsdam in the Fall of 2016 as his office is next to mine. While all these other accomplishments are impressive, I would like to focus on the way I have worked most closely with Michael, research on Climate Change and Human Migration and dialogue groups on being anti-racist.

In 2018, Michael and I began to have conversations about how to create an interdisciplinary project using my knowledge of the environmental issues surrounding climate change and his deep political science knowledge of human migration issues. We met weekly for nearly 3 years examining literature, considering directions and how to integrate two very disparate disciplines. In addition, we wanted to examine the geospatial issues – so integrating a third discipline of Geographic Information Science with environmental and political sciences. Michael is extremely knowledgeable about all the nuance of human migration, particularly issues of forced migration – such as due to violence or destruction. His own work research, teaching about, and examining the crisis around the break-up of Yugoslavia and the ethnic violence in that region have given him a perspective that expands to all human migration.

One thing to note around this early research, Michael had to teach me all of the nuance of examining this type of research, from the ever-changing vocabulary to describe displaced people and migrant populations, to understanding the differences between forced and involuntary migration. His thoroughness and thoughtfulness were evident when we were finally in a position to submit our research to present at the Northeast Political Science Association annual conference in November 2021.

Our proposal for a paper was selected and we began the detailed work of writing a lengthy paper detailing the issues of political theory that had application to the environmental causes of human migration. Michael took the lead on writing this detailed literature review, which was much praised during our presentation. He was able to help me make meaning from the global datasets we had gotten from the United Nations regarding migrant stocks throughout the world over time. We were able to examine the different types of environmental disasters and correlate their timing with changes in human migration, ultimately uncovering new directions for research. Human migration is most often tied to the number of disasters, not the intensity, e.g., a single intense hurricane has less effect on movement than multiple hurricanes, regardless of intensity or level of damage.

This interdisciplinary work was well received at the NEPSA in November, and we

have submitted another proposal to continue this research and submit a paper with our initial findings during the spring 2022 semester. This work is unique and interdisciplinary, and on the forefront of combining political science with the geospatial and environmental concerns facing our planet. These enormous datasets of human migration cannot be understood without the nuance of current geopolitical issues that Michael possesses and shares.

Based on several years of these discussions, Michael and I felt it was a great opportunity to teach a class based on this information, and we're proud to be offering the first WAYS 301 – Ways of Connecting class under SUNY Potsdam's new General Education Program. The class, "Climate Change and Human Migration" grounds students each of the three disciplines, environmental studies, GIS and political science, and then asks them to combine that knowledge, much as we did, to examine a single case study around the world from multiple perspectives. This connection between our research and teaching is extremely helpful to both demonstrate to students, in real time, how academic scholars discuss these issues both independently and collaboratively. We hope to model positive academic behavior to our students to show them how solving global problems will require a multi-disciplinary approach and collaboration between experts is key.

Michael has also used his impressive background in political science and collaboration to become a dialogue facilitator, working closely with Soliya, a non-profit organization seeking to improve diversity interactions through virtual dialogue. In Spring 2020, just as the pandemic was closing in-person discussion, Michael was able to lead a weekly anti-racist dialogue group with the Environmental Studies Department at SUNY Potsdam. As a department we recognized the need to not just embrace diversity, but to actively work to be anti-racist to support our colleagues and students. Michael, through a series of readings, and deeply personal, facilitated weekly discussions over the course of nearly 9 months, led our department to a much stronger and more sustainable group. We were able to continue this work across campus and Michael led similar groups in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. This time-consuming, personal dedication to supporting real change on our campus cannot be overstated – Michael was a keystone in this work. He built on his past experiences and attempted to move our campus efforts to be anti-racist forward through dialogue. I know he has used similar approaches in his classes to great success.

As I mentioned above, Michael's work to improve the life of everyone on our campus is exemplary and I believe has improved the discussions in my own classes on difficult topics. His research work, connecting to our teaching as well, will serve as a model for students hoping to have an impact on their world. I cannot recommend Michael's application for continuing appointment more highly, as a scholar, teacher, and role model for our students.

Sincerely,



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