

January 24, 2022

Dear Dr. Hinckley and Personnel Committee,

It gives me great pleasure to write this letter in support of Professor Michael Popović's tenure application. His knowledge, skills, effective pedagogy, and his commitment to using his formidable skills in service of our campus community have had a tremendous positive impact at SUNY Potsdam.

I have known Professor Popović since shortly after I arrived at Potsdam in 2006 and have co-taught with him as well as served on several campus committees with him. His commitment to our students, campus, and to building a supportive community of peers are all exemplary.

In this letter, I want to focus especially on Professor Popović's teaching record, and specifically on POLS 357V (Violent Dissolution of Yugoslavia) as an example of how Professor Popović brings unique perspectives and combines brilliant pedagogy with thoughtful preparation and networking in order to give Potsdam students the richest possible applied learning experiences. Let's be clear: Professor Popović's POLS 357V Violent Dissolution of Yugoslavia course offers some of the most effective pedagogy I have seen in my 15+ years at Potsdam.

I co-taught POLS 357V with Professor Popović in both 2016 and 2017. This 3-week summer travel course takes students to Croatia to learn the history and politics of Yugoslavia's collapse, focusing on ethnic conflict and nationalism.

Professor Popović has designed this course to include lectures in a formal classroom setting usefully interspersed with guest speaker visits, side trips, tours of museums, religious sites, and more. Students also have reading assignments and turn in short directed daily papers. All of these aspects are carefully crafted to help students learn political concepts, understand how they played out in the specific context of the 1990s Balkans, see where these events took place, and meet and talk to people with powerful lived experience of these events.

Teaching the course as Professor Popović does takes an incredible amount of preparation and groundwork, as well as considerable long-term relationship-building and sensitivity. The course's several regular guest speakers, for example, include the Mayor of Dubrovnik during the 1990s siege, the Commander of the military fort defending Dubrovnik from the Serbs during that siege, the Director of an interfaith dialogue program in Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina's most

religiously fractured city), members of a women's group in Dubrovnik that worked to support women and refugees during the war and continues to work to support women's economic self-sufficiency through learning crafts, and several more. That our students get to meet the Commander of the military fort defending Dubrovnik in a private meeting *inside* Srd Fort after learning all about the events of the siege and touring the Fort, and ask him questions is both a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity and a way of making both history and politics come alive.

Likewise, the side trips include a day trip to Montenegro as well as a several-day trip into Bosnia and Herzegovina that includes not just religiously divided Mostar but Sarajevo (cosmopolitan European Muslim city, besieged during the 1990s conflict) and a visit to the Srebrenica-Potočari Memorial and Cemetery in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina (site of the 1995 massacre). Learning about the events while visiting the sites where they took place – whether crawling through the siege-era tunnel under the Sarajevo airport runway, or walking amongst the over 8,000 grave markers at Potočari – gives students an understanding of ethnic conflict and international relations that classroom lectures alone cannot convey.

Given the course's violent subject matter, Professor Popović also works carefully to help students prepare for the challenging subject matter, as well as create a supportive environment so that everyone has support and, as they need it, space to emotionally process what they are seeing, hearing, and learning. Similarly, he plans in cultural days for processing time – a visit to the beautiful island of Lokrum, a “boat” day island-hopping, and yes, many of the students also geek out excitedly during a tour of “Game of Thrones” filming locations. Throughout the course, Professor Popović's warm gregariousness sets the tone, whether he is fostering group conversation at class lunches, sharing his favorite ice cream joint, or convincing all of us to attend a dinner-music concert or theater performance (Hamlet, performed in a 15th century fort!).

Having co-taught this course twice, it still stays with me as one of the most effective, memorable courses of my career; **I** learned tremendously while co-teaching it, and our students learned tremendously as well. Professor Popović brings similar levels of skill and dedication to his other teaching and work.

In sum, Professor Popović's expertise, teaching abilities and experience, as well as dedication to effective pedagogy and applied learning – along with his exemplary service record – make him an extremely valuable member of SUNY Potsdam's campus community. I most strongly recommend him to you.

Sincerely,

Dr. Libbie Freed
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