

January 14, 2002

APPENDIX

4.1

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my privilege to provide this letter in support of Dr. Uttl's promotion to Associate Professor. Dr. Uttl began teaching at OSU the same year I declared a major in psychology to complement my studies in computer science, thus I have had the unique opportunity to track his growth as a researcher and teacher through a number of his courses. I enrolled in Cognition in the summer of 2000, Research Methods in Psychology the following Fall, Psychometrics and Psychological Testing this past spring 2001, and am currently enrolled in Learning and Memory. Each term, I was increasingly impressed by his enthusiasm and breadth of knowledge, which motivated my decision to ask Dr. Uttl to co-advise my Honors thesis in the spring of 2001. I have had no regrets since: Dr. Uttl has played an integral role in helping me secure a prestigious URISC grant to support my thesis, to advise me of the difficulties of human subjects research, and to offer support as I apply to graduate schools in computer science in pursuit of a Ph. D. in Human-Computer Interaction.

OSU provides clear guidelines for faculty promotion, and I would like to frame my evaluation of Dr. Uttl using these criteria. The Guidelines state that:

*"promotion to the rank of Associate Professor is based upon evidence of the candidate's demonstrated effectiveness in teaching, advising, and other assigned duties, achievement in scholarship and creative activity that establishes the individual as a significant contributor to the field or profession, with potential for distinction, and of appropriate institutional, public, and professional service."*

As I have observed Dr. Uttl teach, research, and provide service since the beginning of his career at Oregon State, I feel my opinion is of particular significance.

I have the most extensive experience with Dr. Uttl as his student in his courses. I first learned of Dr. Uttl through a friend who was taking Cognition in the spring of 2000; she warned me that he wasn't as easy as other psychology professors and expected a lot of hard work. When I enrolled for Cognition the term following, I was pleasantly surprised. Dr. Uttl, though expecting dedication from his students, spent the first lecture of the course detailing study techniques and allowing us to choose an evaluation criteria: what-you-see-is-what-you-get or curved. He warned us that if the class was curved, we would be in competition, thus cooperation was unlikely; he also warned us that on a wysiwyg scale, there wouldn't necessarily be any high grades. I was impressed with the initiative he took to collaborate in our learning rather than lecture and judge us as most professors do.

The following fall I enrolled in Dr. Uttl's Research Method's course, expecting the same. A few unexpected problems emerged: students were frustrated with SPSS and didn't feel it was necessary to learn. Dr. Uttl made a clear effort to emphasize the importance of

learning about new technologies and dedicated many hours outside of class and office hours, as well as finding a student aid, to help students make use of SPSS for our research projects. I feel that Dr. Uttl went above and beyond what is expected—even for promotion—and I learned a great deal of useful skills because of his efforts.

During the term I was also impressed with Dr. Uttl's grasp on the subject matter. Because of the quantitative nature of some of the material in the course, many students needed the material presented in different ways. Dr. Uttl was happy to describe statistical concepts or research processes in a different light using different examples. In a similar fashion, Dr. Uttl used current events in the news to help us understand the course content; during the presidential elections, as the students struggled with standard deviation, Dr. Uttl offered a series of extra credit assignments that helped us both apply our knowledge while learning it, on a real world problem.

When I took Psychometrics and Psychological Testing from Dr. Uttl this past fall, he had improved in other respects as well. His syllabus was very professional, not only detailing the requirements and schedule of the course, but numerous resources and guidelines for the technical research report we were to write. Never before were the objectives of the course and the expectations of the teacher so clear. Though my experience with Dr. Uttl would explain some of it, Dr. Uttl seemed to make notable improvements in his communication, particularly in his enunciation. The small class size also allowed him to spend more time out of class with students, again, more than necessary.

To summarize his teaching skills with respect to OSU's criteria, I believe Dr. Uttl's is more than an effective teacher: he is an enthusiastic, dedicated, and constantly improving one. His emphasis on technology (by having a class mailing list, incorporating widely used statistics programs) is a fine example of this.

My experiences with Dr. Uttl as an advisor have been equally fulfilling. Dr. Uttl first started advising me when I asked him to be an advisor on my Honor's thesis. Not only was he willing to advise, but he was more than willing to help me learn at the same time. I would bring drafts of proposals and he would help me edit them, constantly referring back to course material and asking me to answer my own questions with his guidance. During the first three months he dedicated about 2 hours a week to field my questions and guide my planning.

As I made progress in the planning stages of my research, Dr. Uttl pointed out the possibility of funding the research through a URISC grant, which he was happy to help me prepare. Again, rather than simply answering my questions about the URISC grant specifically, he seemed compelled to teaching me about grant writing in general. During this process, I was also obligated to get permission from the Institutional Review Board to perform the intended empirical study. It was through this process that he taught me important, real-world lessons about the politics of research ethics—something I never would have touched on in class. As I began to test subjects, Dr. Uttl was more than happy to dedicate time to helping revise my study and analyze preliminary data.

My thesis was not the only thing he was willing to teach me about. He was well aware that I wish to pursue a career in academia and shared his experiences thus far, describing the politics, the difficulties, the joys, and the hardships. As I applied for graduate schools these past six months, he spent countless hours drafting recommendation letters and

reading my personal statements. I also applied for a great number of fellowships, which have a tendency to have extensive recommendations. He committed a whole three hour block in November to learn everything about me so he could write as accurate a letter about me as possible.

To summarize his advising and research skills, I would say I learned just as much being advised by him as I did in classes. Again, far from effective, I would classify Dr. Uttl's advising skills as distinctive and extraordinary.

With respect to the final category of service, my own experiences with Dr. Uttl have been limited to his endeavors to update the Department of Psychology's technology, which is indirectly related to the topic of my thesis. First I must say that in Research Methods and Psychometrics (and Dr. Derryberry's offering of Cognition Research) the computer lab was indispensable, and probably would not have happened without Dr. Uttl's extensive lobbying. It has allowed psychology students, particularly those with an aim to pursue graduate studies or careers involving any kind of data analysis to be competitive, by introductions to SPSS.

A related service Dr. Uttl is providing is by investing time and energy into my Honor's thesis which studies the influences of individual differences in problem solving strategies in statistical programming environments. One of the main purposes of the research is to find out what makes environments like SPSS and STATA so difficult for psychology students to learn. By supporting my research, Dr. Uttl is learning and documenting ways to improve his courses and teaching in the future.

I would also like to comment on Dr. Uttl's Tenure Dossier, which has provided for my perusal. Having taken part in the promotion and tenure of a Computer Science faculty member, I must say that Dr. Uttl's performance as a faculty member in the past two years is far better than average. Considering that he has taught some of the most difficult courses in the psychology curriculum I believe his student evaluations are outstanding. Furthermore, the sheer amount of research, collaboration and student advising Dr. Uttl has been involved in is immense considering it has only been two years.

In summary, Dr. Uttl has all the qualities that an effective teacher, researcher, and advisor should have. From my perspective, watching him become accustomed to OSU over the past two years, I only seeing his dedication as a professor of psychology improving. I hope that you will give Dr. Uttl the opportunity to have the same impact on other students at OSU that he had on me.



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