

## Memorandum

**Date:** December 22, 2003

**To:** Ginny Engman, Dean, School of Education

**From:** Michael C. Anziano, Chair, Psychology *MCA*

**Subject:** Class observation for Dr. Brian Burke

I requested an opportunity to observe a class taught by Dr. Brian Burke, our new colleague in Psychology. Brian was most agreeable and it was, indeed, a pleasure to sit in on his Psyc 233 – Personality class on November 5, 2003.

First of all, Brian had obviously established a fine level of rapport with his class. He appeared to know every student's name, called on them by name and they responded to his questions intelligently and thoughtfully. He reminded students of the "shaping exercise" which is an ongoing aspect of the class, and briefly left the room. The exercise is designed to allow the students in the class the opportunity to practice a form of operant conditioning on their professor, by shaping the professor's behavior (students attempt to extinguish certain mannerisms via their behavioral responses when the professor engages in those behaviors). This was a particularly creative, innovative and fun way to teach a psychological concept while allowing the students to take charge of an element of the class (they were trying to reduce or eliminate his reference to things Canadian), and a wonderful exercise in applying psychology to the classroom!

Dr. Burke's presentation of the course material was superb. He used *powerpoint* technology with precision and effectiveness, holding the students' attention, varying the pace of material, and elaborating with considerable expertise on the slides. Brian knew how to present the lecture material in manageable "chunks" of information, he intuitively paused to let students think or catch up in taking notes, and he treated every student question with respect. I was genuinely impressed with Dr. Burke's reply to every question asked by students. There were many questions (a good sign of psychologically safe classroom), and there were several very thoughtful, difficult questions that Brian answered with considerable aplomb and appropriate subject matter knowledge.

A small group exercise was extremely effective, a genuine success as the students eagerly participated and appeared to understand the concepts involved. Dr. Burke's utilization of class time was impressive and effective down to the last minute of class.

I observed Brian to be an engaging, challenging and extremely effective instructor during this classroom observation. I am extremely pleased that we hired Dr. Burke, and I will not be surprised to see his name as a candidate for the new faculty Teaching Award in the next year or two.