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The Chair
The Selection Committee
The Five College Women's Studies Research Center

March 1st, 2012

Dear Chair,

Reference for Dr Aaron Milavec for a Research Associateship

As President of the Catherine of Siena Virtual College (CSVC) I have worked with Dr Milavec for several years and have come to respect and admire his wide-ranging knowledge, expertise and innovativeness in developing new online courses for a wide range of women students from different parts of the world. From very modest beginnings, the College has gone from strength to strength and built up a wide range of courses in gender studies with an annually rising intake of women students, but also some men interested in this growing field of studies. The College's amazing success and its reputation around the world is largely due to Dr Milavec's pioneering work and his passionate commitment to teaching and learning as well as his imaginative approach to online course development and delivery.

You have probably had very few men, if any, who have been selected to receive your Research Associateships since so few men are dedicated to supporting women in attaining their aspirations, and those who do, are usually exceptionally gifted. I would count Dr Milavec among them, since I consider him in every way capable of learning from and functioning as an equal among the other eleven Research Associates who will, most probably, all be women.

In the Project Proposal that Dr Milavec has submitted, he has outlined in great detail the two areas in which he wishes to make a substantial contribution during the nine months of the Research Associateship. I find both of these eminently worthwhile, and both can make a substantial contribution to online learning in gender studies. The first project proposes to devise a research methodology that can resolve the question of whether the bold claims made by online gender studies courses hold up in practice. At CSVC, Dr Milavec deliberately designed the pedagogical methods used to conform to the socially engaged principles that have shaped feminist research as specified by experts in this field. As a result, the women (80%) and the men (20%) taking our courses discovered that they thrived in this innovative learning environment that set out (a) to honor the voices of participants, (b) to create opportunities for reciprocal learning, and more importantly, (c) to empower participants to change the conditions of their lives. Thus, the innovative methodology in the classroom at CSVC is a natural response to the innovative epistemology that took root in feminist research.

While Dr Milavec's research topic naturally focuses upon internal characteristics of CSVC, it is easy to see that this topic has the potential for setting out

the defining characteristics of successful gender studies everywhere. In particular, the participating schools in the Five Colleges have recently begun to offer online courses where Dr Milavec would be a capable discussion leader within the women studies faculty of the Five Colleges by way of critically examining the pedagogical assumptions that lie hidden within every technological template used to design, promote, and evaluate online studies.

His second project aims to investigate, or rather hopes to portray in the form of a novel, how an early Christian community of equals functioned in practice by empowering women, men, and slaves to live under the same rule of life and exercise the same rights and privileges. For almost a hundred years, women scholars have been critical of the way in which biblical texts have been used to selectively enforce patriarchal norms within the various churches. Dr Milavec has taken a little-known Greek manuscript (called the *Didache*) that predates the texts of the New Testament and has capably used it to reconstruct an early form of Christian living that honored women and men equally within its internal dynamics. This was indeed good news for women then, and is even better news for women in their struggles within the churches today!

I do not know to what degree Dr Milavec has the skills to publish a work of historical fiction that will find wide recognition. Yet I am certain that the depth of his research into the *Didache*, and the international reputation that it has already gained, will be powerful allies guiding him in the completion of the undertaking that he has set out for himself. I feel quite certain that he will be enriched in this task by the sharing of ideas and discussions with the scholars and gifted writers that he will meet within the Five Colleges.

From my experience of collaborating with Dr Milavec over the last five years or more I am firmly convinced that he is a very gifted, born teacher who, besides many other achievements, has proved to us beyond doubt that he is an expert in e-learning methodology, and he has put this expertise to excellent use in the development of the successful teaching and learning experiences associated with Catherine of Siena Virtual College. I therefore recommend Dr Milavec to you as an outstanding candidate for one of your Research Associateships at the Five College Women's Studies Research Center.

Yours sincerely,

Ursula King

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