

Dear Committee,

Prof. Roger Martinez is a nominee for the LAS Teaching Award in the Tenure Track category. I urge that he be given every consideration. He is in my view a most deserving candidate. For most of the time since his appointment in the Department of History, I was departmental Chair, charged with the evaluation of his teaching each year. I rated him as outstanding, but beyond that must say that I have not seen in my 31+ years on this campus anything quite like his impact when he arrived several years ago— a new colleague who not only *was* a fine teacher but *infused* his energy and spirit of innovation into the fine, experienced teachers around him. The way he approaches teaching is infectious. As a strong lecturer and effective discussion leader with a ready command of his area, he has all the standard tools, but adds a great deal more. One part is that he uses technology in the classroom as intelligently as I have seen it used and in this way encourages other teachers to consider how they could do more technologically themselves; another is that he gives much of himself outside the classroom to engage students in the historical discipline; another is that he seeks dialogue about teaching with colleagues; another is the remarkable addition of new curriculum where he anticipates that students are looking for something off the beaten path and supplies it—‘Baghdad to Burgos: Jews, Christians and Muslims in the Medieval Mediterranean World...’; ‘A Crossroads of Civilization: Medieval Spain and North Africa...’ Each of those is one of Roger’s new courses, with a distinct concept and an enticing title. They convey something important—that there is fresh thought and immense energy when Roger puts together a course. He is congenial and supportive in his manner, but his popularity among the students has to do as much with this high level of historical excitement that he brings to the classroom.

As Chair I studied an occasional syllabus and found rigor and variety in Roger’s reading and writing assignments, as well as intellectual sophistication in his approach to the discipline. But I also saw him teach. I am thinking in particular of a ‘satellite’ seminar that he was offering early in his time here— eight or nine students from his courses attended once a week for some advanced training on a special, historical theme related to what they were learning in class. I found it inspirational. The Powerpoint was superb—goes without saying for Roger. He also—and not only in this particular seminar—brings artifacts that he himself has collected for the students to consider as historical sources. And the spirit is not ‘look at this neat old coin,’ but rather what can we ask about this coin from its imagery to the fact that it was produced in the first place in order to appreciate more fully the historical time that it comes from? Very creative— fifteen minutes or so in which he guided a set of especially interested students in an informed musing about the past. Then he moved on to the main event that evening, which was a discussion of a medieval travelogue. His technique was an impressive combination of soliciting general reflection on the significance of the document and urging the students to read closely passages that called for careful interpretation. Those students were well-served. Everything had been prepared to pique their interest and at the same time they were going through a valuable exercise in historical method.

No doubt Roger's local claim to fame is the construction together with students of a replica of a medieval siege instrument (last I saw, in the vestibule of the Library). That took hours and hours of his time and was an invaluable exercise for students who wanted to learn not only from the written sources but from direct use of medieval techniques of production. That replica—around ten feet high, I would say—can also be seen as an emblem of his effort to approach students apart from the usual venue of class. No one in our Department is more active in the effort to locate funds for assistantships so that students can collaborate with him and learn from him across the range of his various research endeavors.

Not long ago he and Prof. Forrest joined together to conduct a faculty seminar on teaching method. Roger of course highlighted technological possibilities, but the discussion ranged far and wide about what it is that we try to do by teaching history at the university level. Everyone was very pleased, sad when it was time to leave.

Not only from that one meeting, I know that Roger puts special emphasis on critical reading and thinking as a habit not only essential to the historian, but basic to being a good, thoughtful citizen in a democracy.

I support Roger as a nominee for this award. He is an inspiration to students and colleagues alike. I also think he is one of the very finest teachers that I have ever had the pleasure to know.

Regards,

Rob Sackett, Professor (and Past Chair), Department of History