August 16, 2012

To the Tenure and Promotion Committee:

Re: Dr. Sam Stewart

It is my honor and privilege to write to you on behalf of Dr. Sam Stewart. The intent of this letter is to tell you the ways in which Dr. Stewart has been a leader in our department. I will discuss the ways in which he has shown leadership, practices collegiality, and strives for professionalism as a leader in our department.

Dr. Stewart entered ACU Teacher Education at the same time that I did in the fall of 2007, thus I have watched him establish himself from the beginning of his time at ACU in this department. With a depth of experience and knowledge in the field of educational leadership, Dr. Stewart provides a robust background from which he draws. Dr. Stewart exhibits leadership in our department in numerous ways.

One of the most impressive ways in which Dr. Stewart modeled leadership for our department was demonstrated and sustained as he took on the responsibility for Teacher Education’s accreditation with the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC). Dr. Stewart researched the process, guided the decision regarding which accrediting body most aligned with the position of this department, and then led the department through the entire process. I was personally impressed by his attention to detail, objectivity, and integrity in the process.

In this process, he exhibited both leadership and collegiality. As he lead, he included. As he guided, he empowered. As our department completed the process, we all had a full understanding of exactly what it was that impressed the accrediting body and what it was that needed our attention. We worked together to address the concerns. As a department, we are deeply indebted to Dr. Stewart. Because of the amount of work he invested and because of his leadership skills, we have a sense that we are part of a program and that everything that we do and teach is part of a larger picture and not individually owned.

Dr. Stewart provided leadership for our department as we launched the China Experience, a study abroad opportunity for our candidates over the past four summers (2008-2011). Dr. Stewart demonstrated leadership as he collaborated with foreign school boards, the Head Master of the International Academy of Beijing, and university and departmental procedures and policies to provide such an experience for our candidates. His focus was always on the safety of our students and the depth of professional experience this study abroad experience could provide. Navigating a difficult language in a very large city, Dr. Stewart was successful in providing students with the opportunity to develop their craft in deeply meaningful ways. I was privileged to accompany him on one of those trips. Everything worked very smoothly, and I can honestly attribute it to his vision, attention to details, oversight, and administrative abilities. This experience set many of our teacher candidates apart from other applicants for teaching jobs, giving them the edge in a competitive market.
He is often a voice of wisdom and discernment in our faculty meetings. He thinks for himself and shares his perspective, sharpening us all as we process through departmental decisions. His objectivity helps keep us grounded and focused.

Dr. Stewart exhibits leadership in the ways he practices collegiality. During my own professional journey here at ACU, Dr. Stewart has always been inclusive. He reaches across natural divisions in our department (secondary/elementary) to make connections that are relevant for his students. For example, Dr. Stewart seeks the input of those of us with elementary experience to talk with his secondary students about important issues such as differentiation, behavior management, motivation, and assessment. Dr. Stewart is not one that separates himself because of a different professional interest; rather he welcomes and even seeks opportunities to draw us together. This practice is beneficial to our faculty, but also to the students he teaches. During the end of program exit interviews, the students reflect on Dr. Stewart's wonderful way of practicing what he preaches, modeling what he teaches.

Finally, Dr. Stewart exhibits leadership in the ways in which he strives for professionalism. Again, his objectivity is a critical piece of his leadership. I think of times when we have had difficult conversations, difficult decisions to make regarding whether or not a student could continue in program based on performance. Dr. Stewart's commitment to the profession of education is solid, and it is strengthened by his experience in the field. These situations are, at times, excruciatingly difficult, and it would be easy for us to default to compassion. While Dr. Stewart is compassionate, he remains committed to excellence in teaching. There is a standard to which all educators should be held, and Dr. Stewart exhibits integrity in leadership by maintaining a commitment to that standard. When difficult decisions are made, he often will then extend a hand of compassion to support the student in making next steps.

Another important way I see his leadership in professionalism is in the way he stays current with the research and trends in education. He reads to stay current. He attends conferences. He serves on committees. He presents from his depth of knowledge, research, and experience. He does not stop learning. He has not arrived. He continues to journey on the path of learning.

In summary, I would say that these points I have made are just some of the ways in which Dr. Stewart models leadership for those of us in Teacher Education who have the privilege of working with him. We are a stronger department because of his leadership.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

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