

2013 Academic Advising Award Application

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Attachments
Advising Narrative
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There's an e-mail in my inbox right now from a geology student who says she might like to be a writing minor. She says her dream is to complete a master's degree in science-writing at MIT and write for magazines like *Discover* and *Smithsonian*. Ann Bertagnolli, her Texts and Critics professor, gave her my name; can we talk? My response is, absolutely—this is what I do.

What's ironic is that Ann, as my own English professor and faculty advisor at Carroll College in the early 1990s, is the reason I wanted to become professor, exactly *because* she was such a fantastic advisor. Now I'm sitting here trying to describe what I do, what Ann did that I try to emulate, and my notes include eleven kinds of advising, twelve purposes for it, eighteen principles of it, and six NACADA criteria to evaluate it—no wonder this job feels so big. It's clear why those who do it well make it a center of their work, rather than treating it as ancillary to teaching and an impediment to research.

I'm in my fifth year of academic advising at MSU. In two previous teaching positions, four years as a professor at Utah Valley University and five years as an instructor at University of Utah, I did career advising but was not students' actual degree advisor. I take advising to be the space between course-instruction and long-term mentoring on the overall spectrum of teaching. If I'm interacting with a student or prospective student on college and career-related matters that go beyond teaching a course, but I'm not interacting with the student as a full-on mentor, that interaction likely constitutes advising. I am the academic advisor of record for 30-40 English majors per year, spread among three options (Writing, Teaching, and Literature). I am the lead advisor for the Writing option, because I designed it, developed the coursework for it, and continue to coordinate curriculum for it. Teaching-option students actually have two and a half advisors: An Education advisor, an English advisor (my role), and the English-Ed program coordinator. Thus, advising Teaching students requires perpetual coordination with two other advisors in two separate colleges, and students with very complicated questions.

I mentioned eleven kinds of advising; the preceding paragraph offers one, advising majors on coursework to complete degrees. The other ten? Our department chair does most of our pre-major advising for incoming freshmen, but starting in my second year, if the chair was unable to meet with a student, she asked me to fill in (advising type 2). This is in part because I'm good at blending the humanities concern for *liberal education* with the instrumentalist concern for *job training*. Traditionally English's forte has been the former, but I believe the two must and can coexist, so I'm reasonably good at explaining to concerned parents of potential English majors (trying to follow their hearts) why it is that English majors really can become well employed at something other than starving. This career advising I also do for majors (type 3): I strategize with them not just their education but their career and employment prospects. It's the kind of advising that also gets me talking to Writing *minors* (type 4). All minor advising in the department is the formal role of another faculty member, but in part because of my work with developing the Writing major, I work extensively with students interested in the Writing minor—which is often the door to hopes for professional writing related to one's major. I also advise graduate students (type 5)—I don't wear the hat of advising all incoming grad students in English, but I do advise well beyond the students whose theses I advise (usually one to two of the ten students we admit yearly). This is because I help coordinate the Writing Program in which all our Teaching Assistants are instructors of record, so I am one faculty member TAs seek for advising on teaching and thus other subjects.

Other kinds of advising go beyond “academic.” Types 6 and 7 are related to students’ wellbeing and personal growth during college. There’s the advising that I think of as “college-wellness”: is a student staying *healthy*? (Sleep, food, living conditions, etc.) If they’re having personal challenges that are apparent when we talk (e.g., mental stress, learning disabilities, relationship stress or experiencing any kind of violence), can I facilitate them getting help? Beyond wellbeing, how about “development”? How is the student growing *as a person*? College is a time for finding one’s wings: are my advisees? If not, what can I recommend to a student to help them grow more toward their potential? It’s here that I do advising around study abroad, getting involved with campus opportunities of various kinds, and pushing students to think about service and outreach opportunities. Anything to push their boundaries.

The final four types of advising I do support those boundary-pushing activities themselves. Some of my advising goes to *student organizations* (type 8) like the English Department’s MacGuffins writing club, and more goes to *internship* advising (type 9). Internships are coordinated by another professor, but since the Writing option requires an internship, I support most of our Writing students in internship apps and advising throughout internships. As our department’s *undergraduate research* coordinator (type 10), I advise both students and faculty (particularly adjuncts) on preparing conference proposals and manuscripts for publication, and securing student research and travel funding from the university. I also work extensively with the Undergraduate Scholars Program and advise students on human-subjects related research. Finally, I work on *professionalization* of students who have decided they want to work specifically in my field of Writing Studies research and teaching (type 11). That usually means graduate school, and I put extensive energy into advising graduate applications, from helping students research programs, to giving feedback on drafts of personal statements and writing samples. Usually I do this for 3-5 students per year, but twice have had so many students interested that we form a “grad-apps working group” that convenes once or twice a month off-campus to build applications together.

As I noted, the foundational difference between strong and poor advisors is whether they understand advising as *their work* or as something that gets in the way of their work. Obviously, I understand advising as part of the faculty calling, which is part of why I get very little *other* work done in my office: if my door is open, there are students eager to talk; if my door is closed, there are students eager to knock. A couple more bits of quantitative background to lend scale: During semesterly registration advising, I make 30-minute appointments with advisees, double the standard 15 minutes my department tends toward, and I encourage *all* my advisees to make appointments via electronic prodding. (At least two students every semester say “Based on previous advisors, I didn’t realize that advising with you was actually going to be worthwhile, or I’d have come in before.”) During the rest of the semester and even during the summer, my calendar shows typically 3-4 appointments per week for advising. I estimate that I do that many advising sessions each week unscheduled, as well.

Per the application guidelines, I’ll now talk about my advising philosophy, using those NACADA criteria as general subject guides. First up, strong interpersonal skills that show *caring*—yes. One of the things I’m used to hearing from students, and it saddens me every single time, is “You seem to care so much.” They say it as if that’s unusual, which is heart-breaking. So many students seem actively *afraid* of so many faculty—too afraid to visit office hours or speak to them outside of class, or even in class. I work to mitigate that discomfort by trying to be selfless, solicitous, a strong listener, and openly caring. Interpersonal skills are mostly down to temperament—but there’s an *ethic of interaction* in advising that demands particular values, too. Like *respect* for students: seeing them as *whole people* who are as busy as I am, who are goodhearted and sincere, who will engage to the extent that they are engaged by others in

their academic lives. Committing to respect students' time and energy; committing to treating them as "real" people—these must be givens. Engaging students as fellow-travelers and problem-solvers—such interpersonal interaction enables all the rest of quality advising. The very same respect and care should by definition extend to staff and other faculty the advisor works with: understanding that offering instantaneous help costs staff elsewhere; working to learn quickly so a question only has to be asked once; understanding staff not as servants but *facilitators*. *Goodwill* and putting others first: foundational.

Last spring an advisee dropped by my office with an intriguing question: "I have four semesters left. Would it save me money to spend a year establishing residency? What about if I get an MA here after my B.A.?" *Care*. Sure, I had other plans for the ensuing hour of number-crunching and scenario-drawing, but those other plans were simply an hour of working with students some other way; this was an interesting problem to work on with a serious student, and it seemed like a good use of time for me because it was for him, and he needed some of my institutional expertise (and internet links!)

That example probably applies just as well to the NACADA criteria of *availability*. Funny story: My department will not pay for its faculty's business cards; we have to buy them ourselves. I'd never be without a card—I hand out maybe a couple each time I go to a conference. But I actually give most of them to *students*. Many students can't remember their advisors' names, much less their email address or even office number. There's a difference between saying "I'm always available" or "My door's always open" and *showing* that you mean to make sure they know where your open door *is*. I live online and on e-mail, and increasingly that's where advisees come to look for me, any day, any hour, because they know they'll be welcome. I now sometimes conduct entire advising sessions online—using either text or video chat and online advisor tools. My advisees not only know where my office is, they know they're welcome to find me out of the office, in chat, e-mail, or even Facebook.

Dig deeper in that criteria of "availability" and you get to something I wish we'd say a lot more plainly, something that steps back a little to "caring": the message availability sends. *You matter here. You are a major part of my professional life. You are not intruding—you BELONG here. Working with you is what I'm here to do.* How many more students could we keep in college if they felt that from their advisors? And how about the messages we should send about expecting ubiquitous interaction: *Advisors are here for more than that one time a semester you need to get your registration PIN from them, BECAUSE you are expected to need and desire advising on more than your next semester's courses.* Availability is how we send the message that *it is okay, in fact it is desirable, to have questions.*

It's unfortunate that *developmental advising* is still distinguishable from, just, *advising*. We should consider deeper principle here. *Self-determination*. Advisors don't usually have to live with the results of our advice. *It's not my life*, I am always saying. *I won't tell you which path you should choose because I don't have to live with the consequences.* Also, the value of *learning through choice*. Prescriptive advising makes no sense when one of our roles is to help students learn to sort data and use decision-trees to make complex choices. Advising is too good a teaching moment to squander on "here is the path you should be on." I strive to give students is not answers but lessons in this problem-solving: *Here, let me show you how I would reason about this decision you're faced with.* Show them the problem-solving, not the solved problem. I don't mean to suggest that "developmental" advising means refusing guidance. Some of my colleagues insist that students do all their own research and simply bring the advisor a completed proposal for a solution. They don't want to *work with* students; they want students to self-advise. "It's not my job to tell them what to do." No, but it's an advisor's job to advise.

The most difficult part of descriptive advising is when I see students making poor choices, or, perfectly fine choices that just don't look from the outside to fit them well. Probably half the Teaching students I work with don't strongly want to teach high-school English; they just want to be English majors with good job prospects. Bad idea. A huge part of advising is testing and pushing students: *Do you understand what you're getting into? Are you getting into it for the "right" reasons, that is, reasons that the resulting career can actually support?* I consider one of my biggest advising failures to be one of my biggest advising successes: For three years I worked with a student who will probably hate high school teaching by her third year of it. And yet, if she finds her groove there, she'll be exactly the kind of teacher students desperately need. But my first loyalty is to her, not her future students, so I three years trying to show her the conflicts I see between her intellect and temperament and the high-school teaching environment. Even after student teaching, she's sticking to it, and that of course is her decision. I did good staying out of it, but I wish I'd found a way to help her better see my misgivings. And that, of course, is what's going to happen sometimes in good descriptive advising. In the meantime, she knows which way grad school is.

"Outreach." **"Initiative."** These are helpful and interesting criteria, creating the sense that great advisors don't just wait for students to show up; they go to the students and *build things* that foster the advising project and student success. I mentioned some in my "kinds of advising" laundry list; let me dig a little deeper here. Advising lets me learn what students need more of from faculty, and this use of advising helped me create the Writing option in the English BA by listening to student desires. I then carried advising straight into the option's coursework, designing its "bookend" courses to include advising. WRIT 205 Introduction to Writing Studies anticipates that students with a wide variety of interests and goals when they enter the major will need faculty advising to create their best program of study, so 205 creates those advising opportunities right inside itself. (It does so with internship planning, too, building it in as an advised course assignment.) Then I designed the other bookend course, WRIT 494 Research and Publication, to be the only English capstone course that builds individualized career advising right into the course material. (My next challenge is to make this look good enough to the rest of the department that it gets incorporated in those other capstones too.)

More with students advising *us*: I attend as many advising workshops offered by the Academic Advising Center and the Teaching and Learning Committee as possible. I've been particularly taken with "Let's Hear Their Voices" panels in which students address issues such as advising. Last year I joined the TLC, and I've since constructed two "Voices" panels, one dealing with how faculty and advisors can help students make greatest use of the new Writing Center and its resources, and another dealing with how faculty and advisors can foster undergraduate research experiences for students.

Coordinating undergraduate research is another area of my advising outreach for student success, as students are often unaware of such opportunities. (English and the humanities have not been fertile ground for undergraduate research like the sciences, where students are invited into already-existing labs and projects.) While I'm not yet satisfied with the structures we're building to inform students of opportunities, answer their questions about making research happen, and financially support their efforts, I've made progress the past three years, not least of which is getting the department to approve an undergraduate research coordinator position to begin with. And I've been particularly successful with encouraging English students' involvement in research presented at the National Conference for Undergraduate research, advising successful proposals and presentations by nine English majors and two minors over the past four years and attending the conference with them three of those years.

I noted earlier as well that I've occasionally established informal working groups for English majors interested in applying to graduate school—two of the four years I've completed at MSU, I've had enough advisees (my own, and others') with grad-school interests to put that together. I initiate such work groups by simply contacting students to check their interest and then coordinating a time and meeting space (always off-campus—sometimes a coffee shop, sometimes my own home). We meet a number of times during fall semester prior to application deadlines, walking through each students' needs comparatively so that everyone learns a range of strategies. We also create a reading group where rather than just getting feedback from their advisor, students read each other's personal statements and writing samples, both to give formative feedback and to consider alternative approaches to their own writing.

But I have to admit, apart from those kinds of efforts and some training of English dept. faculty on Advisor Dashboard a couple years ago when it first came together, most of my advising focus is more on who comes to my door—so many students do that this keeps me busy, and fits well with the final two NACADA criteria, which I read as *giving students accurate, timely advice, and helping them complete their programs*. Because they point generally to the same end and “completion” feels to me like simply a narrower focus of “skillful guidance and support,” I'll treat them together, and do so by addressing a final set of my own ethics of advising.

One of the main purposes of advising is learning a student's desires and helping them come to more clearly know themselves. If we are to guide and support students' paths and journeys, then, we have to be extremely good listeners—*soundboards*, essentially, picking up what students are saying and feeding it back to them more fully and richly so that they can “hear themselves think.” Soundboarding often leads to *matchmaking*: those moments of, “It sounds like you're interested in service learning; did you know we actually have an office for that on campus?” or “You're talking about pre-med, but it sounds like you might actually be more interested in pre-vet; have you looked into that?” One memorable such case for me was asking a student, “I hear you talking about working with horses and it sounds like it bores you; I hear you talking about writing and how writing works for you, and your eyes light up. Can you tell me why you're an equine-science major and not a writing major?” Another central role advisors have here is helping students run *scenarios and decision-trees*. Which path to take? Well, that depends on what we can see of the outcomes from various available paths, so let's take some time and carefully lay them out. This was what I did in the example I gave earlier, helping my advisee think about residency. It's what I do when a student is wondering whether to double major, or whether they should try to fit study abroad into a crammed schedule. One of my favorite recent scenario-drawing sessions was with a student trying to decide whether she should be a photo major/writing minor or a writing major/photo minor. We spent nearly an hour working through the possibilities (including that there is no actual photography minor). At the end she didn't have an answer; what she had was a very precise sense of what else she needed to know before she'd be able to make a good decision, and where to go to find out what she needed to know.

Another crucial role an advisor ought to play in helping students find their paths and complete their degrees is that of teaching and assisting students' institutional navigation. We are, for example, *translators* for students. Academia speaks a foreign language to most new students. (I'm reminded of an article I read recently by writing professor and dean-of-students extraordinaire Mike Rose, who recounted an experience with a student who misunderstood the term “office hour” to mean that if you used a professor's office hours, you had to stay the whole hour.) What I do as an advisor is pick up on the terms and procedures that are “failing to translate” and explain them to students in the students' own words, while helping them learn the new terms. There is as part of this translation an ethic of *radical*

transparency here: I tell students what I see as the truth, and my own editorial perspective, on the systems they encounter. I do my best to help them see the system as I see it. When, for example, a student needed to write an appeal to the Core Committee, I explained what I knew about who serves on that committee, what their attitudes and purposes and values are, and what their actual reading situation would be—so that the student could better understand the committee’s position and what it would need to hear to rule in his favor. Also in this “institutional navigation” function is, simply, *accessing resources*, be they financial aid information or counseling services. (I have one of those stories of walking a student who had been party-drugged and likely raped straight from class to the Swingle Health Center.) Again, the principle here is that as a permanent, empowered member of this institution, there are steps I have to take *to empower students*, rather than simply a need for me to completely step out of the way. We want students to learn to operate our system; advising is sort of the instruction manual for how to.

Lastly, there are a few principles I find important to supporting student progress toward graduate and career goals, as part of the broader project of supporting their overall journeys during their college time. Again, interestingly, within an ethos of advising favoring self-determination and developmental advising, it’s important still to have a sort of “time-keeper” role, the drum-major, someone who can set a rhythm, choreograph, handle (in navigational terms) a kind of “station-keeping,” so that all the student’s boats are lined up, not crashing into each other, and staying on course. Most often, the advisor has better vision for that role than the student does. While I want students to keep their own track of the irons they have in the fire and various deadlines related to each (such as filing graduation paperwork or, for Teaching students, filing applications for student teaching), at the end of the day I keep an eye out for such things so that if a student loses track of them, I can step in. I had such a case just last week, where a student applying for graduate study in December had lost track of the GRE testing dates and her need to register. So many little moments like this arise in students’ paths, and they can flounder without a pacemaker steadily asking, “What’s next?” An advisor has to be keeping track and ready to step in. The same is true sometimes of large issues where “the system” needs to be *operated* as only a faculty member can. Often these are emergencies or large life issues where a student’s completing a semester or staying in school altogether hangs in the balance. “Let me make a call”—as I needed to, for example, last summer to the Dean of Students, to explain a situation with the credibility and language of a faculty member, and ask them to get a heads-up to the student’s other professors about a family death—can save classes, semesters, and academic careers. That kind of problem-solving and opening pathways—also in the realm of careers and internships—is a rarer but crucial part of the advising I do.

Ultimately, it’s always about striving to make the best call—accurately reading a situation and giving effective, accurate advice that students succeed when they follow. I think I do that, a lot; others around me (students, faculty, supervisors) seem to think so too, and I’ve become one of the go-to faculty advisors in the English department. Making the right call gets much easier for me when I begin with an ethic of pure care and respect for students; when I put them first, value their time and give freely of mine; when I *listen* deeply and thoughtfully and then show students the world they’re in as it appears to me; when I bring all the resources I know of to bear on their possibilities and problems (and work to constantly expand my own knowledge of what those resources are); when I help students to sketch a path and then walk it—these are the moments that really make working as a professor worthwhile, because they are moments I can concretely identify as doing what I always *hope* to do in the classroom and in my research: change individual lives. With advising, I get to see it unfold for many lives, year by year, right in the chair beside my desk.



October 18, 2012

To: Advising Award Selection Committee
From: Philip Gaines, Department of English
Re: Doug Downs

From my experience as a faculty member, the Director of University Studies, and now the Chair of the English Department, I have learned that most faculty see advising as a task added onto their primary responsibilities of research, teaching, and service. Interest in and commitment to advising varies widely from person to person and department to department, but in many cases, advising is something that faculty members “have to” do. I don’t blame my colleagues at all for this perspective; it’s long been a part of the academic culture which tends not to valorize advising nearly as strongly as it should be.

Department of English

I offer this preamble to articulate a contrast with Doug Downs’s approach to advising. For Doug, advising is not something he *does*; it’s something he *is*. Doug’s advising is inextricably connected to his teaching and his research. Doug has high expectations for the quality of his students’ work and great faith in their potential as learners, researchers, and scholars, but he wouldn’t think of demanding the kind of performance he asks for without coming alongside them to guide and facilitate their progress. Doug has given me the clear impression over the years that he is deeply interested in his students in a way that I can’t recall ever having seen before. When Doug’s office door is open, it is more likely than not that there will be a student sitting in a side chair involved in a rich conversation about an idea or a project or a paper. Doug has a remarkable inclination to see his students as co-collaborators in the teaching/learning process.

One thing I’ve rarely seen in a faculty advisor is the level of engagement that Doug reaches with students that he is mentoring. I’m thinking of one undergraduate as an example of many more. Doug has been working steadily with this student for the last couple of years on coursework, idea generation, project development, and research. In a few weeks, he and Doug will be going to a conference where both will be giving presentations. In addition, Doug has spent hours with this student helping him research and craft applications for graduate school. Seeing them talk and work together has been a joy for me. This student, already certainly very appreciative of Doug’s support and help, will someday look back and say that without Doug Downs’s mentoring, he would not have been able to achieve nearly as much as he has.

I have observed many faculty advisors in my 15 years at MSU, and I have never seen one who comes close to Doug in his interest, commitment, and skill in this critical area. I can think of no one more deserving of an advising award than Doug Downs.

Sincerely,

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To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter in appreciation of Dr. Doug Downs' advising because I am compelled to do so. Dr. Downs' impact on my educational experience as a graduate student and my own practices as an undergraduate instructor has been significant and ongoing. I find it difficult to conceive of how I would conduct myself as a researcher and a teacher without his influence. That influence, now so ingrained in my professional habits, did not come easily for either of us.

Dr. Downs and I did not immediately warm to each other. We were both frankly skeptical of the other when I enrolled in the M.A. English program at Montana State University in the fall of 2010. Dr. Downs' graduate seminar was one of the first courses that I took after returning to school and I was never short of dissenting opinions both in class discussion and in the many office hours that I monopolized. Throughout that semester, Dr. Downs did not once make me feel that I was a burden, despite the quantity of his time that I consumed. He also was never dismissive of my ideas or objections. He always thoughtfully listened and considered my positions before articulating his own response, which was always collegial rather than condescending.

During those first four months of my tenure as a graduate student, Dr. Downs and I earned each other's respect. I use the term "earned" very intentionally here because this required work on both our parts. What is particularly remarkable to me, looking back, is that he chose to exert so much effort on a student who did not make his life particularly easy. While I was never rude or disrespectful, I was always irreverent and challenging. Because I now work as an adjunct faculty member myself, I have a new empathy and respect for Doug's enthusiasm for student interaction, his willingness to prioritize personal meetings, and his consistent ability to talk with students rather than talk at students.

By the time I began the process of selecting my committee of faculty advisors to oversee my thesis, there was no question about whom I would ask to be my chair. Doug and I still did not agree on every aspect of my project but I came to see that dissent as invaluable. Doug was both willing and able to challenge me in meaningful ways. As a result, he encouraged me to be a more dynamic thinker, researcher, and writer. If I ever felt compelled to take a shortcut in my logic or my research, I would hear Doug's objections in my head.

I must honestly give much of the credit for the success of my thesis project to the innumerable hours I spent in Dr. Downs' office. While I was at the generative stage of the project, Doug and I kept a weekly meeting time where we routinely spent more than an hour in discussion. When I was in the writing phase of the project, Doug stayed up to date on drafts, reading and responding to every page I sent him. This may sound like a relatively basic expectation for a thesis committee chair but I tend to be more verbose and prolific than most. The first draft of my document came in around 130 pages of pure text. Doug read every word, most of them more than once.

As a new faculty member at Montana State University, I continue to rely on Doug for guidance and support. I have observed him teaching both graduate and undergraduate courses and know that he treats all his students with the same level of respect and compassion that he showed me. I am personally acquainted with a

non-traditional undergraduate student who is an advisee of Doug's and I know from conversations with her that he offers her seemingly boundless time and sincerity.

What is particularly impressive from my current vantage point is that he manages to prioritize his students so highly while being such a successful and prolific scholar himself. I currently teach three sections of Writing 101, write a bi-month column for a national magazine, and work as a freelance writer as well. I understand the pressure to meet a publication deadline. It can make the idea of meeting with a student for forty-five minutes about a petty three-page paper seem onerous and futile. If Doug feels that way when a student knocks on his door, he never lets it show. He is always happy to save the document in which he's engrossed, and turn his full attention to the student. This is both uncommon and laudable.

It is for these reasons that I feel the compulsion to write this letter. Doug has given me a great deal as a student, a thinker, a writer, and now a colleague. I only hope that this endorsement will serve to aid him in getting just a small fraction of the recognition he deserves.

Sincerely,

Miles Nolte
Adjunct Instructor in English
Montana State University

Dear Academic Award Selection Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Professor Doug Downs who has been my advisor for the past year and a half. When I first entered Montana State University I was beyond nervous about being in the guinea pig group of the newly developed Writing Option for English Degree Majors, but any doubt I had was immediately vanished through the hard work of Professor Downs. He immediately helped me feel comfortable and develop strong connections with my faculty and the rest of the department. He has always made himself readily available to his students both in person and through email. Despite not taking a class from him this summer, he still responded to the numerous advising questions I had for him over the break. As an advisor he constantly is working with my individual needs to help me with my future goals. During our first advising session he asked me, "If there were no limits on what you could do, where would you want to be in five years?" He has helped pushed the limits of my goals and has helped provide opportunities to reach them.

Although last year was my first year in college, Professor Downs helped me gain an internship with *Montana Professor*. He helped me with the internship along the way, always ensuring me that if I had any questions he would be willing to help. Throughout this project he was my academic advisor and oversaw my work within the internship. Professor Downs has done a great job at inspiring my abilities as a writer, but also providing me with the criticism needed to improve. He is an extremely important link to students' academic success.

Besides being my academic advisor for the Writing major, Professor Downs also helped me when I was potentially looking into adding English-Education. Despite being the writing advisor, he has never pushed me to limit myself to one major or direction. He is adamant about students doing what they are passionate about, which is reflected in his ability to have individual, professional relationships with his students. Professor Downs spent a whole class on how an appropriate student/faculty relationship should work. He has done a fantastic job in making students feel comfortable around him, while also providing tools to work with him on projects.

I am currently collaborating with Professor Downs on an undergraduate research project. Without the ability to feel comfortable, or encouraged by him this opportunity would be lost. Professor Downs understands his students' capabilities, and tries to find opportunities that suit them. I strongly encourage his recognition through this award because there is no other advisor that works harder for their students to succeed.

Sincerely,

Emily Jo Schwaller