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WALTER F. GEORGE SCHOOL OF LAW  
*Office of the Dean*

February 4, 2005

Dear Members of the Selection Committee:

I write in enthusiastic support of the consideration of Mercer's The Legal Profession course for the National Award for Innovation and Excellence in Teaching Professionalism. The course, supported by Professor Longan's commitment and energy, offers a model of a new and important approach to developing professionalism in law students.

Many efforts to teach the difficult concept of professionalism focus on lawyer behavior, revealing a premise that if we teach lawyers and law students how to act, the professionalism problem will be solved. The Legal Profession course takes a different approach. Instead of targeting specific behavior, it focuses on the development of identity and character in law students. The course encourages law students to become reflective, to learn about and from lawyer role models, and to incorporate their personalities, values, and goals into their lives as lawyers and law students. It gives students permission to struggle with such fundamental questions as: who am I and what is my place in the world? It encourages students to view their work as a calling, and to understand both the opportunities for meaning and the challenges that lie in the complex tasks of lawyering.

The Legal Profession course is a result of thoughtful structural and pedagogical choices. Its place in the first year curriculum tells students that its lessons are to be used during the rest of the student's legal education, as well as after graduation. The course is required and graded, both of which signal an equal stature to that of other required courses. The innovative pedagogy connects students to lawyers in ways that the traditional first year curriculum does not. Through guest speakers, the oral history project, and biography assignments, lawyers are invited literally and figuratively into the classroom. The powerful device of narrative allows the richness and complexity of real life to become a part of students' professional development, contrasting with the more sterile "relevant facts only" approach traditionally used in other first year courses.


The very name of the course, The Legal Profession, recognizes the transformative experience of students as they become lawyers. The name contrasts the concept of professionalism with the rules taught in the other required ethics course, The Law of Lawyering. It is also significant that The Legal Profession is developed and taught by Professor Longan, the holder of the Law School's endowed professorship in legal ethics and professionalism. No one completes the first year at Mercer without being informed by Professor Longan's national work on issues of professionalism.

I have talked at length with Professor Longan about the course. It's not been an easy task for him to move from concept to the institutional commitment of resources to actually teaching the entire first-year class about intangibles using a different pedagogy than that used in most of their other courses. Doing so has required a real commitment to meeting the need for a different way of thinking about how to be a lawyer. Professor Longan's passion for the task and seemingly endless energy have moved the course from a grand vision to concrete reality.

Legal education sometimes fails its students by offering too narrow a vision of what it is to be a lawyer. Students learn that all that they must bring to being a lawyer is how to think, and their lives begin to divide into the professional and the personal. Too many experience a loss of self and purpose during the three years of law school. I am proud to be at a school where The Legal Profession course represents a bold attempt to teach students a different lesson: that their personal and professional lives can be integrated, and that ethical behavior results when they bring all of who they are to the practice of law. The promise of such a course for long-term change is very real, and the evidence of individual impact is clear. Student evaluations speak poignantly to the hunger for the lessons of the course and to the effectiveness of Professor Longan's efforts.

Professor Longan's students will be better lawyers as a result of this course, as well as better citizens, friends, neighbors, and partners. The Legal Profession course is both innovative and excellent, making it the right choice for the National Award for Innovation and Excellence in Teaching Professionalism.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Daisy Hurst Floyd". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Daisy Hurst Floyd  
Dean and Professor of Law

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