

7.19 Annexure 4B: Report by MJ Morgan

<p>25 March 2009</p> <p>Reference letter for Dr S Mukwambi Teaching</p> <p>I am a colleague of Dr Mukwambi in the School of Mathematical Sciences at UKZN. I have worked closely with Simon on several modules in the past few years, as co-lecturer and tutorial demonstrator, and I have a so had the pleasure of being present in many of his lectures, both in undergraduate classes and research seminars.</p> <p>In particular, in the first semester of 2007, Simon taught <i>Advanced Business Mathematics</i> (Math 104) while I was teaching the anti-simon equivalent, <i>Business Mathematics 1</i> (Math 117), so we worked together closely, coordinating our lectures, material presented and tutorial problems, as well as negotiating minor and minorising possible OLS sites. We would also discuss small administrative difficulties with some of our common students, and a tentative way to present topics that students were struggling with. Then, I was a tutorial demonstrator for his <i>Advanced Mathematics with Applications</i> (Math 218) module in the first semester of 2008. This much more challenging module required me to consult with him occasionally on some details of the course, and I would walk through his module answers to free each tutorial, checking back with him when necessary. Simon was always pleasant, accommodating and very clear and patient in his explanations. I taught the first year applied mathematics module <i>Operational Research</i> (Math 144) several times in the 1990s, and have been able to advise Simon on aspects of this module, which he has given in semester 2 of 2007 and 2008.</p> <p>Whenever I've been in a lecture room with Simon, I have been highly impressed by his clarity of teaching, his patience and empathy with students, and his quiet but complete control of the class. Simon doesn't make the work too easy – in fact, they can require demanding – but his slow and clear presentation of the concepts means that any student in attendance cannot but understand his explanations. Simon works very hard, for all his classes. His OLS website's comprehensive – the course structure clearly explained to the students; once tests are marked by the tutors, they are checked personally by Simon; marks are accurately captured and adjusted; promptly; he early generates feedback from his students about their reactions to the tests; and he keeps them working with frequent modest during tutorial sessions. His handling of student queries during lecture is responsive, especially considering the few years that Simon has been lecturing. He expects that his students were corresponding what he will regularly assign some reading or extra problems during a lecture, and his tutorial problems can be very challenging.</p> <p>Simon has modernised both Math 144 and Math 218, adding new topics, and streamlining others. In particular, Math 218 had faced some real student controversy in 2007, and he took over and helped the course become more relevant. Comparing tests and examinations to Math 144 with previous lecturers, I find Simon's questions to be more realistic, and he carefully tests more aspects of the material. At times he could be a bit more generous with the marking for the amount of work required. He has offered to lecture the operational research of mathematics course for several years, patiently teaching very weak students, at a below-numeric level much of the time. Considering Simon's strong research profile, I find this remarkable.</p> <p>Clarity of presentation carries on to his research seminars. In an academic environment in which most seminars become too technical and, for me, incomprehensible after the first few minutes, I am always struck that I can follow Simon's lecture to the end, because he gives plenty of examples, and knows when details to give out. The quality and thoroughness of his research is not in doubt, but he chooses to explain and his ease to his audience rather than just trying to impress them with all his results.</p>	<p>His presentation at the 2008 South African Mathematical Society (SAMS) conference in Cape Town was delightful, and convincing and impressive.</p> <p>I consider Simon an exceptionally good lecturer, and our School is very fortunate to have such a pleasant, cool-headed and reliable worker. I would happily support a promotion for Simon to Senior Lecturer.</p> <p> MJ Morgan School of Mathematical Sciences Westville Campus, UKZN tel: 27-360-7882-7313 morganj@ukzn.ac.za</p>
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