



February 14, 2012

To the Excellence in Graduate Academic Advising Award Committee:

I have known Dr. Marc Edwards since 2007, when he, an environmental engineer, and I, a medical ethnographer, partnered to redress government agency wrongdoings in the now-infamous Washington, DC lead-in-drinking-water crisis of 2001-2004. Since that time, I have had the honor to collaborate with Marc and his graduate student advisees through the creation of a new graduate course on engineering and science ethics, several research studies using engineering and ethnographic methods to address complex public health and public policy problems, and participation in PhD advisory committees for advisees with specific interests in ethics and public policy.

While Marc has received acclaim for outstanding science and ethical practice, the academic community has yet to recognize the very key to his accomplishments: a pioneering approach to graduate academic advising. Marc's unique sense of responsibility toward his advisees is not merely a positive aspect of his work. It is the very root of his success. Marc views his advisees as dependable and resourceful partners who possess the intellectual prowess not only to learn from him, but also to teach him, and who are capable of assuming responsibility for work with far-reaching societal implications. Marc's approach ensures student ownership of all aspects of research, including experimental design, fieldwork, grant proposal writing, and even collaboration and communication with the public. At the same time, and perhaps more importantly, his approach teaches that the practice of engineering is inseparable from ethics. Marc's relationship to his advisees extends to sometimes heated but always collegial and thought-provoking discussions about the responsibility of engineers toward science and the public. Having observed Marc's advising for several years now, I have come to believe that it creates a Vygotskian-style "Zone of Proximal Development" that encourages students to outperform themselves by developing competencies that most engineers only begin to explore much later in their careers, if ever. The result is that, as part of their education, Marc's advisees gain experience performing as Marc's colleagues and as 21st century engineers who recognize the impact of their research on high-stake scientific debates, public policy decisions, and public health, and who understand the significant moral responsibility that comes with their work.

Marc is a rare and exemplary graduate academic advisor who cultivates self-confident, interdisciplinary-thinking, socially conscious, self-reflective, and professionally accomplished engineers. This award would send a timely message of support for a model of academic advising not commonly found in the field of engineering, built on a vision of graduate students as capable intellectual and moral leaders in a world that increasingly demands more from young professionals than mere technical competency. Please accept my strong and enthusiastic support as you consider Marc for the Alumni Award for Excellence in Graduate Academic Advising.

Sincerely,

Yanna Lambrinidou, PhD
Adjunct Assistant Professor

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