



January 28, 2008

Letter of Recommendation for Ryan Wilson

I am delighted to write a letter of recommendation for Ryan Wilson. He was my advisee in Northern Arizona University's M.A. program, and I worked closely with him throughout his five years here. He also completed the coursework for a Master's degree in Education and certification to teach high school during this period, earning a GPA of 4.0 in both programs. Let me comment first on his performance in the History M.A. program and then discuss his qualifications for teaching and/or community work in Latin America.

Ryan took several graduate seminars with me before he began his M.A. thesis. He excelled in all of these classes that required intensive critical analysis of complex readings. In the class on theory and methodologies, he examined a variety of cross-disciplinary and philosophical approaches to the study and teaching of history. I was struck by his intellectual curiosity and his desire to probe ideas deeply. In this class and the ones that followed, he did not hesitate to raise questions about assigned readings and engage other students in critical dialogue. But what really caught my attention was his deep passion for learning more about Latin American culture and history. He had lived briefly in El Salvador, where he developed lasting friendships and began to perceive some of the legacies from the Salvadoran civil war in 1980s.

As a student, he was anxious to learn about the roots of this conflict as well as how years of warfare had influenced the lives of the people he had met. In particular, he decided to study the life of Lil Milagro Ramírez, a young female intellectual who joined the Salvadoran revolution against a long history of suppression of human rights in its early days. His M.A. thesis very effectively analyzes the path she took from her academic career as a law student and poet, deeply influenced by Christian socialism, through her work as a human rights activist, to her affiliation with the armed insurgency, which led to her death. The thesis draws on relevant theoretical and secondary literature, original documents, and oral interviews with members of her family and others who knew her. It provides an original nuanced and gendered examination of an evolving revolutionary culture in El Salvador. The interviews with her family in El Salvador and in the United States are the threads that weave her story so vibrantly; they also reveal the extent to which Ryan used his personal skills to gain their trust.

Throughout the time that he took courses, Ryan also held a half-time job and actively worked to make the Flagstaff community aware of a variety of social justice issues, and he took part in the many outreach activities of NAU's Latin American Studies program. He took time off from writing the thesis to completely immerse himself in

student teaching where he had his first opportunity to work directly with students and experiment with teaching strategies to meet the needs of a culturally diverse student population. . Although I have not had the opportunity to observe his teaching in the high school classroom, I have seen him making presentations to and interacting with his peers. I have no doubt that he is the kind of dedicated teacher who expects a great deal from his students but is willing to mentor them in developing skills. His friendly demeanor, enthusiasm and creativity are assets in enabling him to present history, social studies, and culture to students in a way that makes it relevant to their lives. Most recently, Ryan has worked with hundreds of students as a teacher and mentor in a Flagstaff Unified School District program that provides an environmental and outdoor living experience for middle school children. Over the last five years, he has accumulated a wealth of experience in working as a community educator and a classroom teacher.

His greatest desire at this point in his career is to teach high school in Latin America. His experiences in El Salvador have shown that he is comfortable living and working in the region. He also possesses a very thorough understanding of past and current issues in Latin America. Above all, he has a passion to teach and engage directly with any one of a number of cultures in the region. I have no doubt that he will combine his keen intellect, creative energy, and outstanding interpersonal skills in any undertaking that he pursues. Ryan Wilson is the dedicated and caring kind of teacher that today's increasingly interdependent world needs to challenge students to become active, compassionate, and conscientious citizens. I give him my highest recommendation.

Sincerely,
Susan M. Deeds
Professor of History