

## REFERENCE LETTERS



13 January 2005

Douglas A. Noverr, Professor and Chair  
 Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures  
 Michigan State University  
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 East Lansing, Michigan 48824  
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To Whom It May Concern:

Dr. Christopher Buck has asked me to provide a letter of recommendation in support of his applications for open positions.

For four years from 2000–2004 Dr. Buck has taught as a full-time visiting assistant professor in the Department of American Thought and Language and in (since our name and mission changed on July 1, 2003) the Department of Writing, Rhetoric and American Cultures and the Department of Religious Studies at Michigan State University. Ordinarily, these visiting assistant professor appointments are limited to three years, but Dr. Buck's appointment was extended for another year so that his expertise in world religions could be utilized to promote new courses and a program focused on Islam and Middle Eastern and Eastern religions. In that role he has developed a 200-level Integrative Studies in the Arts and Humanities course (a required course in the core curriculum) titled "Religious Myths of America," which covers a wide range of religious faiths and traditions (from Catholicism to Judaism to Black Muslim) within the context of the larger history and culture. This has been a very successful course in terms of

enrollments and student evaluations. He has also taught three different first-year required composition courses. In every area of his instructional performance he has met or exceeded the expectations of fulfilling the curriculum while giving these courses a special thematic identity.

One of his most significant strengths is his absolute commitment to high quality and challenging instruction and to learning that actively and regularly engages students. He makes the high standards and expectations of university-level work clear to students and challenges them to aspire to them, not just as the terms of the work and grades but as goals or benchmarks to achieve in the process of intellectual self-development. He gives students the conceptual tools they need to do work at higher levels so that they can synthesize and integrate information or texts into a fuller understanding of their cultural meanings and applications. I have been in his classroom at least three or four times every year at his invitation and seen the kinds of high quality group reports and Power Point presentations (with visuals, audio, and video) his students produce. He sets the stage for students to work collaboratively and productively, consulting with them in the developmental stages of their reports and visual presentations. His courses feature a high level of instructional technology with students performing almost all their tasks in a digital environment.

Another strong feature of his teaching and character is his incredible work ethic. He is able to handle a heavy load of classes and responsibility for teaching writing and to do this in effective ways. Part of this is due to skillful organization and to good planning in the scheduling or cycling of assignments, and part of this is due to the fact that he is able to work "smart" with instructional technology. He prepares his courses carefully in the syllabi and puts all the needed resources (on-line texts, class web sites, computer labs, media, outside speakers, etc.) in place before the semester begins, giving him solid management over the courses. I have worked with him in the development of every one of his syllabi and selection of course materials at his initiative because he wants to fulfill the curriculum fully and aim

for excellence. He is exceptionally resourceful at finding and utilizing texts and other materials that enrich the courses and engage students.

My appreciation for his work ethic and his commitment to the full dimensions of university-level learning has increased every year. By introducing students to thinkers, writers, and activists such as Alain Locke and Robert Hayden and to religions such as the Baha'i faith (on which he has published extensively), he provides experiences and perspectives they would not likely encounter. His own deep knowledge of the world's religions and traditions and his comparative studies of them ground his courses in discussions of ethics, the basis or essentials of faith—religious and civic, the quest for spiritual truths, peace and social justice, ideas of progress. These inquiries are grounded in historical and contemporary contexts so that students can understand their evolution over time and their immediacy.

Even though he has had a heavy teaching load (including overload courses needed to support his family) every semester, Dr. Buck has remained active in his scholarship with a series of journal articles, encyclopedia articles, and two major books with another under contract as well as conference papers. He has energy and determination that have helped him maintain a course of scholarship.

I recommend him fully and enthusiastically and believe he will be a major contributor to a program and institution that can offer him an opportunity to establish a permanent position.

Sincerely,  
Douglas A. Noverr, Professor and Chairperson



DR. DAVID COOPER, FACULTY  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

22 January 2001  
Douglas Noverr, Chair  
Department of American Thought & Language

Dear Doug,

By taking on his first assignment teaching a section of ATL 135, Christopher Buck has brought a new level of energy, insight, and intellectual richness to the ATL 135 curriculum. More important, he has expanded the horizon of our community impact in ways that I find exciting and promising.

I am grateful that Christopher asked me to review all his student agency writing projects from Fall semester 2000. To me, the most impressive work was a grant proposal researched and written by a student named Matt Horton. Under Christopher's direction and with his encouragement, Matt prepared an extensive twelve page grant proposal entitled "Public Policy Perspectives through Service-Learning." He collaborated with his agency contact person, Jerry Lindman, Director of the Michigan Public Policy Initiative, on a successful grant proposal in the amount of \$2500 to support ATL 135 student work this semester (Spring 2001) on an issues briefing handbook targeted at first year state legislators. The one-year project addresses the needs of state policy makers for high-quality, well-written briefs on issues of concern to a new voting-age generation as well as the need to foster engagement and involvement among our own ATL 135 students in public policy making.

This project bears careful watching. It has the potential to become a landmark accomplishment of ATL 135, both in terms of the challenges and opportunities for advancing student writing, critical thinking, and research skills, and in its wide impact on public life in Michigan. Moreover, as President McPherson notes in

his endorsement of Matt's proposal, "The model service-learning program will be shared with service-learning faculty at MSU and could be duplicated at other Michigan Campus Compact member institutions."

The handbook is just one example of how much of a difference Christopher is making in furthering the goals of the Service-Learning Writing Project, in general, and ATL 135, in particular: namely, to advance students' writing skills while helping develop their public voices.

Perhaps we ought to contact Ron Davis, the College of Arts and Letters Information Officer, and let him know that Christopher is overseeing a service-learning opportunity for students in our college that might be of interest to the wider MSU community, and beyond.

Sincerely,  
David Cooper  
Service-Learning Writing Project



From: Ana Maria Almonte <[ana.almonte3@gmail.com](mailto:ana.almonte3@gmail.com)>  
Date: September 8, 2011 12:46:41 AM EDT

Dear Sir/Madam, It is a pleasure to write this reference letter in support of Dr. Christopher Buck. Dr. Buck was my professor for the course American Thought and Language: Evolution of the American Thought (ATL 150), a required writing course, which I took at Michigan State University back in 2002 during my freshman year.

From all the activities I enjoy, writing has always been among my most favorite ones. Whether it is English or Spanish, I know I can do it better than before, and I know most of this knowledge and improvement is thanks to Dr. Buck. Despite the fact that we are already in 2011, I still remember what I accomplished at my ATL 150 course: the teamwork, the readings, the research at the library, the presentations... and the motivation and guidance from our professor. "Ana, I see that you have a promising future."

Such phrase stayed in my mind since that first semester at MSU, since it was one of the motivations I carried with me in the latter years while undertaking the challenging and exciting life of the engineering undergraduate student. And today, here at my home country, I am writing a letter of recommendation for my professor. Today, back in Peru, I did not hesitate to do so since I am simply grateful.

It was an absolute pleasure to work with Dr. Buck. His energy and enthusiasm provided a positive atmosphere in the classroom. Wherever he goes, Dr. Buck will certainly be a great asset to his employer and his profession.

Without reservation, I highly recommend Dr. Christopher Buck for any goal he may pursue. If I can be of further help or assistance, please, do not hesitate to contact me ([ana.almonte3@gmail.com](mailto:ana.almonte3@gmail.com)). Thank you for your consideration. Sincerely,

Ana Maria Almonte Civil Engineer B.S. (2007), Michigan State University M.S. (2009), University of Central Florida.



From: "jack yops" <[jkyops@hotmail.com](mailto:jkyops@hotmail.com)>  
Date: Mon Jul 5, 2004 5:45:16 PM America/Detroit

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a previous student of Dr. Christopher Buck's—something of which I am very fortunate. The experience I initially encountered at Michigan State was strongly negative; this, of course, exponentially enlarged my pessimism about the university-level education system. Unfortunately for Dr. Buck, the thing I most despised about the University was the "scholarly" attitude that emanated from the professors' pompous pretension (to avoid generalization I will state that I don't think all professors are subject to this disease). The quality of Dr. Buck's that perplexed me the most was the absence of

this most disturbing quality—especially when his class centered on the responsibility of each student to fulfill a requirement to research and write as a scholar.

The old maxim is true: “You reap what you sow.” But you reap more when you have help sowing. I didn’t experience this at the University until I entered Dr. Buck’s class. The class syllabus had rigorous requirements, and the only consolation was the hope of tremendous benefits—that hope became a reality. The class was structured in such a way that a student couldn’t possibly get behind. We had assignments that were due at specific dates which, when compiled, became the content of a larger assignment due at a later date. This method that Dr. Buck utilized successfully compensated for the lack of commitment most students had, especially me. This method started the process the first week.

An assignment was due very early; this, of course, shocked me and forced me to get working. The assignment required us to do research, understand its content, and then concisely convey it in written form with proper MLA format—he emphatically stressed the importance of MLA guidelines. The effect of this was an implicit psychological response of each student to immerse himself or herself in studying and efficient time management. What must be said, though, is that Dr. Buck made himself available to questioning about the assignments; not only that, but he was willing to provide help for us with the completion of the assignments, without relieving our responsibility to do it ourselves—his accomplishment was stress relief rather than work relief.

The basic subject matter of the course was an analysis of various poetic interpretations of America and its condition. I choose William Blake, another decision that I won’t regret. But, as you know, the mytho-poetic style, although stimulating, is very obscure. With the help of the scholars, I came to a clear understanding—or what I think is a clear understanding—of William Blake’s vision of America (and Britain). I never fully comprehended the potential effect poetry could have on an individual’s outlook on politics, culture, art, and philosophy. Dr. Buck’s course motivated me to synthesize my own personal philosophy with that of poets and authors.

The problem with most research papers that I had previously completed was a lack of confidence in the sources. This problem was solved when Dr. Buck taught the class how to research for reliable scholarship in the most efficient manner. He took the class to the library so that a specialized librarian could teach us where and how to look for reliable scholarship. This, along with the constant overview of writing styles, MLA format, and objective analyses of scholarship, has provided me an invaluable contribution to my progress as a student and scholar.

It is apparent that I have the indelible marks of Dr. Buck’s mentorship. It has been my pleasure to express to you the extent to which Dr. Buck has influenced my academic life, especially when only few have had an impact. I have confidence that I am well prepared for any class related to literature, research, and writing, no matter the requirement. It is my strong recommendation that Dr. Buck be given the opportunity to impact other students’ lives.

Sincerely,

Jack Yops  
(810) 423-8573



August 4, 2003

Kristen Jane Daddow  
Associated Students of Michigan State University  
College of Agriculture and Natural Resources

Professor Noverr [Dept. Chair]:

I was in Dr. Buck’s class spring semester of 2001, Section 053. I felt that the topics he chose to cover, mainly the Toulmin Argument Analysis Model and Race Relations in America, were excellent.

At first I was quite confused with the Toulmin model, and I was not quite sure how it was going to [be] beneficial, but as I continued to use it in class, and as I refined the techniques in my term paper, the value of the Toulmin model is very clear. I wish I had not waited until my junior year to take this course, because I had already taken other classes that required writing and this system would have made my arguments clearer as well as stronger.

The topic of race relations really opened my eyes to the struggle that a person of a minority may face [while] attempting to achieve their goals, as well as the history of some minorities in the American culture.

Most importantly in my mind that Professor Buck taught me was the ideas of respect and kindness. The semester that I was enrolled in this class was the hardest four months in my personal life [that] I have experienced. Not only was I suffering from Mono, but my mother and fiancé were both hospitalized, and needed long-term care. Realizing that I might not be able to finish on time, Professor Buck granted me an extension on my work so that I may have a few more weeks to be able to work to my potential.

If he did not grant me that time, I might not be graduating and moving to Medical School this January. I am being bluntly honest when I say that I only signed up for his class because it fit in my schedule and I needed it to graduate, but I never realized that it would have an impact on my future, both personally and professionally.

Sincerely,

Kristen Jane Daddow



August 4, 2003

Hoikab Kim  
Graduate Student in Professional Accounting  
The Eli Broad College of Business  
Michigan State University  
[kimhoika@msu.edu](mailto:kimhoika@msu.edu)

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to this letter to support Christopher Buck who is applying to a tenure-track teaching position in your university. Dr. Christopher is an excellent candidate that warrants your serious consideration. I believe Dr. Christopher is qualified with that position.

I have known Dr. Christopher since I attended his class, which is American Thought and Language (ATL: public life in America) in the spring semester of 2001. I was lucky taking his class. As you know, the formal writing class is a big scary thing for individuals that English is as a their second language. I had a big fear about ATL at the beginning of the class. I could not follow the class, and could not understand what I had to do for the class.

One day, I visited Dr. Christopher's office to talk about my concerns of the class. Dr. Christopher tried to help me out as needed. Dr. Christopher guided me the way to improve my writing skills in his own time. I learned how I could write the research papers, gather supporting information, and make papers strong.

Dr. Christopher always encouraged me to accomplish the course successfully. Finally, I gained the confidence of writing, and completed three issue briefs for publication in a book, which are joint project with Not-For-Profit Organization, MPPI and Michigan Children. Without Dr. Christopher's help, I could not imagine my unbelievable writing improvement and the accomplishments of issue briefs.

I believe my life is upgraded through Dr. Christopher's lesson. I saw Dr. Christopher always tried to help students' concern out, and respected students' opinions regarding the course. Moreover, Dr. Christopher treated students fairly. Dr. Christopher enthusiastically taught students, and retained strong teaching skills. Dr. Christopher is the best professor that I have seen in my life. Hence, I believe Dr. Christopher is entitled to have a tenure-track teaching position in your university.

Dr. Christopher is a great experienced professor who is dedicated to his teaching. Dr. Christopher will be an excellent professor in your university. If you have any further questions about Dr. Christopher, please feel free to contact me.

Hoikab Kim



June 3, 2001

April L. Sutton  
 College of Engineering  
 College of Education  
 Michigan State University

To whom it may concern:

My name is April Sutton. I am a second year electrical engineering and secondary education major. I am pleased to write in regards to my former professor, Dr. Christopher Buck. This past spring semester I was privileged to have Dr. Buck as my American Thought and Language 150: Evolution of American Thought professor.

Throughout the semester we covered a plethora of social and historical issues. The textbooks chosen by Dr. Buck were both informative and interesting. My classmates and I found ourselves engrossed in our book [Richard W. Thomas, *Understanding Interracial Unity* (1997)] while also learning. Discussions, themes and

papers inside and outside of class challenged our personal and social views.

Rather than discussing the Evolution of American Thought, Dr. Buck prompted his students to challenge American Thought and to evaluate ourselves. It was very common in class to hear a student say "I never thought of that," or "I have never had to deal with those issues so I don't think about them." However Dr. Buck invited us to think about things from a different perspective. As well as covering interesting social topics, we also developed an outstanding research tool.

Dr. Buck began to teach us the Toulmin model as a way to analyze an argument. Although the ideal behind Toulmin is simple, the process is complex. However, Dr. Buck turned an extremely difficult process into a useful, simplistic process for his students. Aside from textbook explanations and class discussions explaining Toulmin, Dr. Buck used several mediums to explain the Toulmin model, including a web site which many students found extremely helpful.

Dr. Buck is very dedicated to his students, his work and his job as a professor. While nursing students through research papers, explaining academic journals, text and resources Dr. Buck wrote his own research paper as example for his students. Feedback and help is always available on any project that we were working on. Every step of the semester was filled with patience, encouragement and assurance.

Professor Buck encouraged his students to become aware of their surroundings for the sake of the class but also for students as individuals. As an example, a class assignment was attendance at the "Race in 21st-Century America" conference that occurred April 4-6, 2001 at the Kellogg Center (MSU). I think that attendance at this conference changed the view of many individuals, including myself. Each of the speakers at the conference addressed topics and ideals on race that many people experience daily and were not aware of. With Dr. Buck encouraging students to attend and recognizing the importance of race relations within the class atmosphere, as well as globally, students began to identify the impact on their own lives and communities beginning with Michigan State University.

As a student, it is impossible to ask for a better professor. I feel Dr. Buck brings a great deal of understanding and compassion that in my school career I feel is rare. Dr. Buck seems driven by his motivation to learn and ambition to share his personal knowledge with others. As a professor, Dr. Buck has propelled many social issues into the forefront of his classroom. Forcing students to evaluate their behavior and ideals, but most importantly requiring them to think. It has been an honor to know Dr. Buck and joy to be involved in his class not only as a student but also as a person.

Sincerely,

April L. Sutton



Sept. 6, 2007

Nabeel T. Yehyawi, MA  
 Doctoral Candidate in Clinical Psychology  
 University of Indianapolis

To whom it may concern:

I am pleased to offer this open letter of recommendation as an enthusiastic endorsement of Dr. Christopher Buck, Ph.D., J.D., whom I know to be an avid scholar, a passionate teacher, and a dedicated professional in his chosen fields of endeavor. I first came to know Dr. Buck during my undergraduate studies at Quincy University, where he served as my professor of world religions, as well as one of my mentors on the subject of theology. Over the course of his lectures in the classroom, our discussions in his office, and the arranged activities in the community, I learned a great deal from Dr. Buck and am confident that he would be an invaluable addition to any university or organization.

Dr. Buck has been one of the most versatile professors I have had the pleasure to learn from. As he led our exploration into the world religions, he would effectively integrate lecture and seminar approaches to enhance the material and engage every student in the learning process. As the year continued and our theological acumen increased, he sought to consistently challenge our development by assigning each student in the course a world religion and bringing us together to present, debate, and collaborate on their differences and similarities in both theory and practice. These interactions were instrumental in teaching me to understand and appreciate not only theology, but diversity as

well, which has been a great asset in my work as a psychotherapist. These experiences taught me much more than theology; they taught me the value and technique of effective communication in an increasingly diverse world.

Dr. Buck's ability to construct such a multifaceted learning environment readily exceeds that accomplished by many academics whose courses focus solely on literature and theory. He made it very clear that in any academic or professional field, one must be intimately aware of how theory finds its way into practice in the everyday world. For this reason, he arranged a series of community experiences, in which each student was to pursue a religious study within a denomination that was not their own and critically evaluate what they had learned. After each student had presented their research, Dr. Buck lucidly lectured on the power and use of parables in each faith and asked that we continue our research on how each faith utilizes parables to make complex theological principles readily understandable to everyone.

I would be remiss if I did not discuss some of his wonderful qualities as a person. His diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious background provide him with a breadth of very personal understanding of the importance of valuing individual human differences. Dr. Buck's door was always open to his students to discuss theology, but also personal and professional development. Taking advantage of these opportunities provided me with the guidance and growth I needed as a student, motivating me to excel as an undergraduate and to pursue graduate studies in my own chosen field. As must be obvious, I recommend him most highly and without reservation. I believe he will be an outstanding attorney or professor of law, regardless of the practice or program fortunate enough to have him.

Sincerely,

**Nabeel T. Yehyawi, MA**  
 Doctoral Candidate in Clinical Psychology  
 University of Indianapolis





MILLIKIN UNIVERSITY.

DECATUR, ILLINOIS

May 1999

PROVOST AND VICE-PRESIDENT FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

To Whom It May Concern:

Dr. Christopher Buck was on the Millikin University faculty from Fall 1997 to Spring 1999. During this relatively short time period he made a number of very positive contributions. I was pleased that we were able to attract him to a two-year term position. I believe he has a bright future in higher education.

Dr. Buck combines a keen intellect with a thorough understanding of the typical student. He insists on thoughtful discourse and rigorous completion of the assigned work. At the same time he acknowledges that students are imperfect and some are less perfect than others. He will generally find a way to get the struggling student through his course. And, if the student doesn't make it through the course, he will work with the student to find a way to repeat the course or redo the material.

Professor Buck spoke with me several times about his pedagogical approach. He is a strong advocate of service learning. He makes use of current technology. His students work in groups. He has a number of innovative thoughts on how to help students organize their thinking as they compare religious systems. His thinking on how to ensure that a small religion department provides a comprehensive major is interesting.

I have examined Dr. Buck's teaching portfolio on several different occasions. I was impressed with his reflection and reassessment after each semester. He starts with good ideas on teaching and then makes them better by paying attention to what students have to say. His teaching, as perceived by students, improved in each of his four semesters at Millikin. Because his ideas of teaching are innovative and creative they make some students uneasy. Over time, he has learned how to help students feel comfortable with instructional approaches that are unfamiliar to them. I have always been delighted with Professor Buck's enthusiasm for searching out the best approach to education. I find his

ideas promising and intriguing. Because of the respect I have for his creativity as an instructor, I am glad to see that he is rapidly learning how to gain acceptance from the students for his approaches.

Dr. Buck is rapidly developing a reputation as a first-rate scholar. Despite a heavy teaching load at Millikin (four courses per semester along with several independent studies), Professor Buck has continued to be a productive scholar. His vita will show several books written during the short two-year period while he was simultaneously creating a wide range of new courses. I have read a number of reviews of his works; I am sure that Dr. Buck will or can provide those as part of his application packet. You will find that his work is well-received and highly respected by leaders in his field. What is not obvious from the reviews is that much of this work was created while he was developing courses that cover a full range of fields including several that are well outside his area of expertise (for example: First Year Writing and courses in African-American Religion).

It is sometimes difficult to get tenured or tenure-track faculty to immerse themselves in activities that are designed to promote institutional rather than individual or departmental goals. It is certainly unusual to have a term contract faculty member devote significant time to these activities. However, Dr. Buck was one of the chief proponents of the holistic elements of the University's curriculum. He regularly focused institutional attention on issues of mission and vision. Just this past week, he brought together a group of community and institutional leaders to establish an agreement that will enhance community service by Millikin students.

I am pleased that Dr. Buck was on our faculty for the last two years. He brought enthusiasm, energy, and humanity to the task of educating our students. I hope you will include him among those you interview for your position. He will impress you as a thoughtful scholar and a caring teacher. People like Chris belong in the academy. They ennoble our profession.

Sincerely,

Mauri A. Ditzler

Acting Provost and Vice-President for Academic Affairs



MILLIKIN UNIVERSITY.

DECATUR, ILLINOIS

Reference Letter for Dr. Christopher Buck  
by Dr. Ed Yonan, Chair  
Religion Department  
Millikin University

As Chair of the Religion Department, I have worked closely with my colleague, Dr. Christopher Buck, over the past two academic years (1997-99), the duration of his appointment here at Millikin University. As a small, two-man department, we have consulted and collaborated on departmental concerns, from consultations regarding individual students to proposals for curriculum changes. I am therefore in an ideal position to comment substantively on Dr. Buck's teaching, university service, and scholarship.

As a newly minted Ph.D. whom we imported from Canada in 1997, Dr. Buck had much to offer by way of scholarship, but had only three years part-time experience as a sessional lecturer at Carleton University in Ottawa. In this, his first, full-time teaching position here at Millikin, Dr. Buck learned a great deal by way of "on-the-job" training. In retrospect, more mentoring would have been useful. While student teaching evaluations have consistently placed Dr. Buck in the "competent" category, such evaluations really fail to adequately assess Dr. Buck's performance qualitatively. In the absence of teacher training workshops, Dr. Buck experimented. He tried several teaching strategies, some of which were quite innovative. I would like to mention some of them.

Perhaps more than any of his colleagues at Millikin, Dr. Buck fully integrated certain character-building aspects of the new Millikin Program of Student Learning (MPSL). One of the objectives of this program was to encourage students to reflect on three "core questions": (1) "Who am I?"; (2) "How can I know?"; (3) "What should I do?" During his first year here at Millikin, he required each of his students to ask these very questions of others: Protestant pastors, Catholic priests, Jewish rabbis at various synagogues and temples, Muslim imams at several mosques, Hindu and Jain priests, Zoroastrian high priests, Native American spiritual

leaders, Tibetan monks, Zen monks, and even Taoist and Wiccan practitioners. Not only would students incorporate these interviews within their research papers as part of their original "field research," Dr. Buck would have the students give oral presentations to their fellow students when, towards the end of the semester, the class would adopt a seminar format.

Another major feature of the MPSL was service learning, required of all incoming freshmen during their first semester at Millikin. Prior to his arrival at Millikin, Dr. Buck had never heard of service learning. Then, in Spring 1998, Dr. Buck launched Millikin's largest service learning project, which he has continued to maintain over the past three semesters. Dr. Buck's service learning site is the Lutheran School Association, the largest Protestant parochial school in Decatur. This was a real success story. Two of his students are currently completing a filmed documentary on this project. An official "community partnership" will be concluded at a signing ceremony in May.

Dr. Buck was perhaps the only faculty member here at Millikin to expand service learning to include sophomores, juniors and seniors in non-sequential courses in which service learning was not required. In this experiment, Dr. Buck determined that, as a rule, such students had more to offer in service learning and found it more rewarding than did most freshmen. There was a liability here in that a number of students did not live up to their service learning commitments. This resulted in a more than usual number of Incompletes that weren't always made up.

Millikin has also identified several "core values" that it wishes to cultivate in students. Dr. Buck worked these values into his syllabi during his first year here at Millikin. In Fall 1998, Dr. Buck adopted, as a textbook, a multi-author volume focusing on the proposed "Global Ethic" that was one of the most important outcomes of the 1993 centennial of the World's Parliament of Religions. For a take-home final exam that semester, Dr. Buck asked each of his students to reflect profoundly on that document after understanding its rationale, and after having read the various perspectives presented by representatives of the world's religions. As part of his "outcome-oriented" teaching objective, Dr. Buck encouraged his students to e-mail their recommendations to

Leonard Swidler, editor of the Global Ethic text, thus making Millikin University (in theory) to be the first university to give formal input on the Global Ethic document. In practice, none of his students did so. But I quite admired Dr. Buck's vision, and his philosophy that it would be ideal if students could look back on a particular course and, beyond having earned course credit, feel that he or she tried to make a small difference, whether that was in service learning or in contributing to the Global Ethic debate.

Dr. Buck really has received no recognition, except from me and his students, for having created a new course, "African-American Spirituality." It remains to be seen whether or not this course will be taken up by Dr. Buck's successor. But I can say that this, along with his many informal contacts among minority students here at Millikin, has gained for Dr. Buck the respect and admiration of many of our African-American students.

In terms of university service, Dr. Buck has served as faculty advisor for two student organizations: the Islamic Studies Association (ISA) and the Baha'i Association of Millikin. He has also offered to be a faculty sponsor for Presbyterian and National Baptist Convention groups as well. For the past year, Dr. Buck has served on the Council on Global Affairs. His most important contribution on that committee was proposing that a conference on Global Affairs and Global Studies be held in Spring 2000. This proposal has been approved.

Departmentally, Dr. Buck proposed an ideal solution for a real problem we were facing: how to offer a core program of departmental courses when nearly half of Dr. Buck's and my teaching loads were committed to interdepartmental freshmen seminars and critical reading, research and writings courses. The solution was to offer courses that satisfied a range of core program requirements (U.S. Studies, Global Studies, Cultures Track, and courses for Religion majors and minors) without "double-dipping" and dramatically increasing course enrollments.

In terms of scholarship, Dr. Buck's second book, Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Baha'i Faith, is due to be published this month (April 16th-hardcover; April 30th-softcover). This is certainly one of the very few books to be pub-

lished by Millikin faculty this academic year. Dr. Buck has also contributed one encyclopedia article as well as several journal articles and book reviews.

In a spirit of constructive criticism, and with Dr. Buck's consent, I wish to authenticate my positive comments with a few criticisms as well. Dr. Buck needs to take a more careful inventory of student teaching evaluations, and to more fully appreciate the extent of their career determinism. He would respond well to mentoring, provided he is more open to it, which I believe he is now more than ever. Dr. Buck also needs to exercise more control over his students' performances, in that he has tended to be too lenient when it comes to deadlines, etc. In so saying, I think you should seriously consider making an investment of Dr. Buck. At a programmatic level, he is an adaptive and innovative implementer, and in this respect is a perfect institutional fit. What remains is for Dr. Buck to progress from "competent" to "excellent" in terms of teaching evaluations. The honeymoon is over. I am confident that Dr. Buck has greatly benefitted from his teaching experience here at Millikin.

To close, on a personal note, most important of all to me has been my colleague's unswerving loyalty. He has nominated me twice for teaching excellence and campus leadership awards. His last nomination letter was several pages in length and was quite substantive. Dr. Buck and I enjoyed a rare camaraderie. Had it been within my power to do so, I would have personally offered him a tenure-track position. Perhaps your institution may take such an interest in Dr. Buck. I highly commend him. I shall miss him.

Please feel free to call me as a reference on behalf of my colleague.

Dr. Ed Yonan, Chair  
Religion Department  
Millikin University  
April 19, 1999



MILLIKIN UNIVERSITY.

DECATUR, ILLINOIS

March 8, 1999

Michael Frazier  
 Philosophy/Religious Studies  
 Millikin University

Dear Dean McIntire and Dr. Yonan:

In a voice message I received on 5 March 1999, Dr. Buck asked me to write a letter conveying to the both of you my thoughts concerning his strengths as a professor for the Millikin department of religion based on the two courses I have taken under him: RE 383 (Western Religions Seminar) and RE 204 (African American Spirituality).

As I indicated to Dr. Buck in an e-mail last year, I feel that his lecture style is rigorously systematic. This is evidenced by his innovative "DREAMS" paradigm models which incorporate historical and phenomenological approaches to comparative studies of major world religions.

As a religion and philosophy major, I have worked closely under Dr. Yonan, whose area of academic expertise is philosophy of religion, particularly in the western Christian tradition. I have found that Dr. Buck, with his historical/phenomenological/linguistic approach to mid-eastern and eastern religious traditions, provides a necessary departmental balance for the academic study of religion.

Dr. Buck's technological/computer expertise is impressive. In class, Dr. Buck lectures from computer generated outlines (which are projected onto an overhead screen for the class to view). Also, he utilizes the computer as an academic aid with the world wide web and "On Common Ground"—a religion CD-ROM multimedia program produced by Harvard University.

The well-attended Fall 1998 lecture, "Inside the Nation of Islam" by University of Illinois-Springfield professor, Dr. Vibrant [Vibert] White, was conceived of and coordinated by Dr. Buck.

A common theme in all of Dr. Buck's courses is a balance between "academic theory" and the "practice" of the faith community. Accordingly, Dr. Buck encourages not only academic research in journals and texts but also what he calls "field research"—attendance of a service of the faith community being studied.

I believe I can speak accurately of the DREAMS assignments and Dr. Buck's philosophy of education, generally.

1. The DREAMS assignments are new [DREAMS paradigms]—they are the unique academic invention of Dr. Buck. As such, some changes and "evolution" of method and instructions are to be expected. The intent of any changes, I suspect, is to provide Millikin students with an ever clearer conceptual tool for comparative analysis of world religions.
2. The times in which I have seen Dr. Buck be lenient on deadlines or cooperative research, his intent has been to maximize learning and research opportunities—insuring that they turn in their finest possible product. While Dr. Buck does give general assignment deadlines and instructions in the syllabus, I believe these are always secondary to his larger spirit of encouraging the student to engage in the process of further research and revision.

I appreciate this opportunity to share my perspective of the professorship of Dr. Buck in the Millikin religion department. It is my hope that this will contribute to a complete picture of his teaching philosophy and practice.

Respectfully,

Michael Frazier



MILLIKIN UNIVERSITY.

DECATUR, ILLINOIS

October 3, 1999

Karen D. Banks  
1135 W. Wood St., Apt. 1010  
Decatur, IL 62522  
(217) 464-8891

Dear Sir or Madam:

This letter is to serve as letter of recommendation for Dr. Christopher Buck.

I have known the applicant for approximately one year. I was a student of Dr. C. Buck [African-American Religions] at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois. I must say I am disappointed to see him leave.

As an incoming freshman, Dr. Buck very much helped to prepare me for not only the rest of my college career, but for life. He truly does possess the qualities necessary for educating others.

Dr. Buck's lectures were based on his knowledge for the material as well as his life experiences. He is very passionate about teaching and dedicated to helping students succeed. He has touched my life and I am sure his future students will say the same.

Dr. Christopher Buck will truly be an asset to wherever he is called to teach. I am available to answer any questions you might have. Please feel free to contact me at the above telephone number.

Sincerely,

Karen D. Banks

Karen D. Banks, Student  
Millikin University  
Decatur, Illinois  
June 8, 1999



MILLIKIN UNIVERSITY.

DECATUR, ILLINOIS

Jon R., Student  
Millikin University  
Decatur, Illinois

To whom it may concern,

I am a student at Millikin University and took Professor Buck's University Seminar class as a freshman. I am a junior now and have acquired much information through Buck's teaching methods.

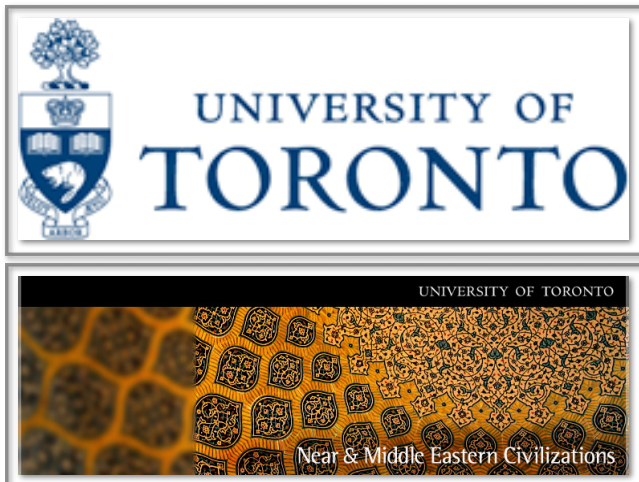
The topic of the class was religion. Religion is a big topic among students of college campuses. Many people fear of what they do not understand or know about. Religion is something that can be easily understood and also something that can be hard to understand depending on the religion itself. I learned more about my religion by reading the material that was assigned and also from class discussion. What I liked the most about his class was that the class discussion was based primarily on what we know of religion and its practices.

Professor Buck is a remarkable professor and I would recommend him to further teach religion because he has helped me and many others in recognizing and understanding religion and it's different practices. I feel like I understood what Professor Buck was saying because he taught with a sense of wanting us as students to understand the principles. The book, On Common Ground, was a very hard book to read and so most of us in the class found it hard to talk about the book so we took the time to have more in-class discussions.

Professor Buck is a well-liked man on campus because of his pleasant nature towards kindness. He keeps in touch with his former students and keeps tabs on them on how well they are doing in classes. I would say that Professor Buck is a nice friend to have as well as a great professor of religion. Thank you for your time in reading my letter.

Sincerely,

Jon R



Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations  
 University of Toronto  
 4 Bancroft Avenue  
 Toronto, Ontario  
 M5S 1C1  
 Canada

August 30, 2005  
 RE Faculty Positions

Dear Search Chair:

I have been asked by Christopher Buck to write a letter in support of his application for the position you are now advertising. I am very pleased to have an opportunity to express my opinion of Dr. Buck as both a scholar and a human being. Under the first heading, I would begin by pointing out that evidence of his natural gift for analytical and critical thought was presented to the academic world before he had ever entered post-graduate studies. This article — published in one of the more prestigious journals of Islamic Studies in the mid 80's — was on the identity of an obscure group mentioned in the Qur'án; and, it continues to be cited by leading scholars in contemporary Qur'anic Studies in current scholarship.

That both of Buck's postgraduate theses have been published is also eloquent testimony to the remarkably solid and professional quality of both his Masters and Ph.D. dissertations. That each are largely unrelated as far as problematic, methodology and, for that matter, subject matter are concerned, and that they followed

one upon the other in an unusually brief time-span demonstrates Buck's truly exemplary dedication to the life of the mind, his capacity and willingness for demanding and minute research, and his abilities to organize difficult bodies of thought and raw material into coherent presentations whose value are articulated in lucidly argued conclusions and summaries. His Ph.D., now published by State University of New York Press, is a model of comparative scholarship quite unparalleled in the existing literature. A third book, on the understudied American Bahai philosopher, Alain Locke, has just been published. I have not yet had a chance to read it.

There is one important connection between Dr. Buck's three books and it is one that will be of interest here: in varying degrees, both explore for the first time intellectual problems arising in the study of the history and doctrines of the Bahai religion. Few professional scholars have ventured into this area of study for a variety of reasons.

The proper study of the Bahai phenomenon requires familiarity with the two main languages of its texts: Arabic and Persian, a grounding in the cultural and political (not to say religious) history of Islam, a sophistication with regard to approaches in the study of religion itself and, of course, an awareness of the significance of the rise of this apparently most unislamic of Muslim religious developments of the crucial period of colonialism in the 19th century. Contemporary scholarship is beginning to recognize Bahai as important not only for its intrinsic interest, but also as an example of a religion which really did develop in "the full light of history" (unlike Islam, no matter how often this phrase may be applied to it). A recent conference held under the auspices of the Religious Studies Department (August 2001) of the University of Copenhagen on the broad theme of Bahai and Globalization heard papers on a variety topics based generally on one problem: the transformation of a localized heretical Iranian messianic movement into a global religious community and "orthodoxy" said to comprise upwards of 5 million members.

Dr. Buck's dedication to the academic study of this phenomenon may be thought prophetic. At a time when it was virtually impossible to study the Bahai movement outside the usual kinds of community based or paro-

chial settings, he has produced two full-length and groundbreaking studies on aspects of the work of Husayn-Ali Nuri, Bahá'u'lláh (d. 1892).

In the first book, he demonstrated the close relationship and dependence of this author's major doctrinal work, *The Book of Certitude* (Kitáb-i Íqán) on the venerable and complex tradition of Qur'anic exegesis. This was a major, unprecedented achievement in Bahai Studies, and a solid and valuable addition to Islamic Studies. The book was originally a Masters thesis written under the guidance of leading North American expert in Qur'anic Commentary, Andrew Rippin.

I am not a specialist in Comparative Religion, so my response to his second book is perhaps somewhat naive, but I must say I found it absolutely breathtaking in its imaginative methodological presuppositions, aspects of its argument, and in its conclusions. The book must be extremely suggestive for comparativists. In the surprising pairing of ancient Persian Christianity with Bahai as objects for scientific comparison, Buck has established a convincing framework for the most serious of discussions regarding the nature of religious expression as such. At times his observations and analyses arising from the comparison of St. Ephrem the Syrian and Bahá'u'llah, attain an almost Joycean artistry and power, as this brief excerpt from his "Conclusions" for *Paradise and Paradigm* will perhaps demonstrate:

Symbols ensoul ideas. Visions of the empyreal realm have ... an extraordinary capacity to inspire. Paradise is iconoplastic. The beatific panorama, the symbolic landscape, the ideals and imagery that inform Paradise in the religious imagination are grounded in root metaphors and are animated by key scenarios reflecting a theology of activity, in a dynamic interplay of belief and behavior, myth and ritual, within the religious grasp of totality.

Buck's remarkable scientific output is possibly matched by his creativity in the classroom. You have received ample indications of his teaching expertise, his genuine respect for his students, and his inability to underestimate their potential for diligent scholarship. I know that he takes his classroom responsibilities most seriously, and views the relationship between teacher and student as something of a solemn trust. Lest this

raise questions of humorlessness, I hasten to add that students also find his lectures and classroom workshops stimulating and engaging to a very high degree. He obviously has a profound love for the academic enterprise and contributes to it at a very high level, both as a prolific scholar and creative educator. These two do not always go together.

As a person, one would be hard-pressed to find a man of more integrity, of willingness to help, to be a part of a team and who is pleasant withal. This is also not something one usually finds in such a prolific and creative scholar. I suggest in the strongest possible terms that you interview Dr. Buck for the job. He has what you are looking for: expertise and distinction in several religious traditions — especially Islam, a stellar teaching vita, and collegiality. Further, there is no doubt that his reputation in Religious Studies will continue to grow as Dr. Buck continues to pursue new and innovative research questions. (See for instance his current interest in the influential but largely understudied philosopher of the Harlem Renaissance, Alain Locke). He is incapable of standing still and it is clear that he has some distance to go before reaching the peak of his intellectual journey. If you would like to discuss Christopher's application further, please do not hesitate to contact me by email or telephone. With every good wish, I am

Sincerely yours,

Todd Lawson

Dr. B. Todd Lawson  
Associate Professor  
Islamic Thought  
514.398.3080  
todd.lawson@utoronto.ca



February 14, 1997

Willard G. Oxtoby  
 Trinity College  
 6 Hoskin Avenue  
 Toronto, Ontario  
 Canada M5S 1H8

To Prospective Employers:

I write concerning Christopher Buck, who received a Ph.D. in the study of religion from the University of Toronto in 1996.

You should definitely interview Chris if you have an opening in Western or Middle Eastern religions, comparative study of religion, or, for that matter, other comparative studies. (He can also cover South Asian and East Asian religion very competently at the introductory level.) Buck is a candidate who could many things for a humanities-and-social-sciences department in the present age, when downsizing increases the demand for versatility. Let me elaborate.

Chris is a remarkable prospect in the comparative study of religion, because he combines an energetic quest for synthesis and for comparative structures with a vast, almost encyclopedic command of specific historical and textual detail regarding the world religions. Some people, one finds, are theorists; others are detail historians.

Chris combines the two talents. Comparative studies, if one is to pursue them well, put a premium on versatility and range, while still demanding responsible concentration and depth. The ideal appointment should be a teacher with broad intellectual range, capable of relating constructively to the interests of colleagues in other fields and covering a wide swath of subject matter in the curriculum. The person should have communication skills, and the ability to speak in analogies and engage an audience coming from diverse backgrounds or presuppositions. At the same time, the person should have a profile of sustained research in depth, contributing to the institution's visibility on the "cutting edge" of knowledge. The candidate should be able to challenge a serious student to use investigative skills responsibly and probe beneath facile generalizations. Buck's range and contagious intellectual enthusiasm meet the former of these requirements. His energy and vigorous atten-

tion both to theory and detail also meet the latter.

Let me mention Buck's already published work, and what is on the way to publication. One book grew out of his master's thesis. A 325-page scholarly study, it was published under the title, Symbol and Secret: Qur'an Commentary in Baha'u'llah's Kitab-i Iqan. Buck did a remarkable job, examining how a Baha'i scriptural work employs strategies and techniques of scriptural interpretation in citing the Qur'an—important, since it was in the context of nineteenth-century Shi'ism in Iran that the Baha'i movement originated. I am impressed with the work's sophistication and at the same time with its clarity.

Chris's doctoral dissertation compares paradise imagery in two traditions: in early eastern (Syriac) Christian sources and in certain Baha'i scriptures. But it is about more than these two bodies of texts: it is an ambitious investigation into what we do when we compare any two religions, and how we fill out our comparative categories. When it was finished and defended last summer, the "external" examiner was Jonathan Z. Smith, of the University of Chicago; Smith rated it among the top two of the roughly 100 dissertations he had advised or examined. Now being revised and streamlined for publication as a book, the work is scheduled to appear as a book from the State University of New York Press, Albany.

Buck's track record on mapping out research projects and bringing them to completion offers an excellent prognosis for his continuing productivity. One of his current proposals, eminently publishable, will deal with the shape of religious expression and affiliation in contemporary America. Current Christian, Muslim, and other identities will play a part in this work's detail, but there will again be important category insights concerning religion, tradition, and identity. Chris will deliver, I am confident to assert. And the product will be of top quality.

The quality of mind that Chris brings to his research is one that makes intellectual connections. He discovers parallels and resemblances among diverse data, at the same time as he also keeps track of the continuing and distinguishing differences. The same is true



of his teaching, which I have observed as maturing and growing in skill over recent years. He was a TA for me two or three years ago, and got favourable student reviews. More recently, he has had responsibility on his own at Carleton University in Ottawa.

Some will turn to Chris's research and his teaching for the broad strokes of the parallels he is likely to outline; others will turn to it for the rich nuancing of detail. Both will be right to do so, and both will come away satisfied. Both in research and in teaching, they will meet in him an engaging and open mind, coupled with intellectual integrity and responsibility. He will be an energetic committee worker and a versatile editor in joint efforts. He has remarkable skills in the preparation of desktop-publication copy, fastidious almost to a fault. And he has the added benefit of being a friendly, generous, and conscientious person. As a colleague, he will be willing to help out in collaborative projects and in contributing to campus life generally.

By all means, choose Chris Buck. With his range and his personality, he is a real find. He will make an absolutely excellent colleague.

Sincerely,

Willard G. Oxtoby

(Prof.) Willard G. Oxtoby  
Study of Religion  
University of Toronto



FROM: Jason Smith Books  
 PHONE NO.: 312 294 0147  
 Jun. 13 1996 10:54 AM

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
 The College  
 1116 East 59th Street  
 Chicago, Illinois 60637

Appraisal, Mr. Christopher George Buck,

**PARADISE AND PARADIGM:  
 KEY SYMBOLS IN 'PERSIAN' CHRISTIANITY AND  
 THE BAHAI FAITH.**

Centre for the Study of Religion.  
 School of Graduate Studies.  
 University of Toronto.

Mr. Buck's thesis is a superior piece of work, one of the most sophisticated exercises on comparison that I have read, and, therefore, a work of historic importance with respect to the study of 'patristic' Christianity, a field that is notably 'primitive' with respect to comparative issues. Of the nearly one hundred dissertations I have served as director or reader for, in the fields of history of religions and early Christianities, this is, without question, one of the two or three best.

Mr. Buck's lengthy methodological introduction (pp. 1-27) is a remarkable theoretical essay. He shows a capacity to work with a variety of contemporary figures and issues in the general study of religion and to extract from serious conversation with them a complex, comprehensive, critical and constructive proposal that is both persuasive and original. This proposal is systematically carried through the body of the thesis, providing both the organizational principles for the data and the procedures which govern his comparisons.

I am much impressed by his concluding chapter (295-308) which undertakes a self-critical evaluation of the models and methods he employed. (This last is all

too often omitted in dissertations in the human sciences.) Obviously, I have some questions. As Mr. Buck notes, his model is eclectic, drawing from a variety of figures, so that figures of quite disparate orientations are made to support one another. With respect to his particular area of comparison, the proposal would have been enhanced by a specific and detailed contrast with the analogous projects of Robert Murray and Geo Widengren.

I am most appreciative of Mr. Buck's thick historical narrative in which the symbolic investigations are situated. (More work could be done on the theoretical relations of the one to the other, but what he has done is well in advance of the vast majority of works in the field). Again, at times, we differ in historical judgement (e.g. it is increasingly less likely that [the] Gospel of Thomas can be claimed as a Syrian document) but these do not affect the overall thesis.

The extraction of the central symbolic logic of both the Syriac and Baha'i materials is utterly convincing and reveals, among other virtues, a thorough command of both the primary and secondary literature. This, then, contributes to a comparison across differences of the logics which richly illuminates both the specific symbols and the cultural matrix in which they are found.

This is one of those rare theses in which the parts are so intricately and necessarily interrelated that one hopes for the rapid publication of the entire work rather than the separate publication of one or two chapters.

Without hesitation, I strongly recommend that the thesis be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

**Jonathan Z. Smith**

Jonathan Z. Smith, Robert O. Anderson  
 Distinguished Service Professor of the Humanities  
 University of Chicago