

Lance Duerfahrd
Assistant Professor of English and Film Studies
Purdue University

April 4, 2011

Recommendation for Chris Flynn

Christopher Flynn was my student in English386/History of Film from 1898 to 1938 class. This is a demanding class that asks the students to closely study films outside their habitual viewing spectrum and to read theoretical texts about early cinema. Chris was truly one of the exceptional students in the class. The intelligence of Chris' observations during class and the way he translated his film encounter into contributions that helped others grasp the films were some of his characteristics that immediately caught my attention. His written work for me was bursting with a sense of the nuance, and the particular flavor, of the films he was discussing. In his discussion of the classic *Singin' in the Rain*, Chris did a wonderful analysis of how dance, in the film, became a way for the characters to discuss complex ideas. Noting that the characters need to dance in order to do everything from make plans and to lay out a commitment to doing a film-within-the-film, Chris connected the spontaneous physical movements of the actors with the way we "see" characters inventing concepts and projects on screen. Most students when they watch the film (if they do), just remark the gracefulness of Gene Kelly. Chris saw much more than that- he detected the birth of the whole plan for the film, and with it the emotional and intellectual life made palpable on screen.

What makes Chris such a likeable character isn't only his brilliance. What I especially admire about Chris is the sense of dignity and tact that he brought to the table, both in and outside class. Students of his exceptional level of intelligence usually come encumbered with much more attitude. Not Chris. He has a winning modesty to him and a graciousness that is almost disarming. He answered questions directly yet imaginatively and replied to the observations made by his peers in a way that gracefully credited intelligence- his own as well as the speaker's.

Mixed with Chris' sense of tact is his voracious appetite for film. He came by my office hours several times this semester even though he wasn't enrolled in any of my classes. He just wanted to talk about film and to feed his curiosity. Among the films he watched was an experimental road movie by Monte Hellman featuring James Taylor and Dennis Wilson in exceptionally reticent roles. I found it telling how attuned Chris was to the silence of these figures: he found it expressive, as he put it in an email to me. I mention this because I think it is testimony to his ability to see things in a vivid and evocative way, and to his passion for learning outside the classroom. Chris is a singularly earnest fellow, enough to appreciate the silence of a man who made a career singing. I cannot recommend him highly enough.

Department of English

Sincerely,

Lance Duerfahrd