UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT
UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA

Afdeling: Diensleer
Division: Service Learning

11 January 2011

Dear Sir/Madam

LETTER OF SUPPORT: ROBERT G. BRINGLE

With this letter I would like to provide reasons, from a personal and a broader South African perspective, for wishing to support Professor Robert G. Bringle's nomination for the Chancellor's Teaching Award at IUPUI.

The idea of integrating service learning courses in the academic learning programs of students studying at South African higher education institutions was introduced via a national initiative, referred to as CHESP (i.e. the Community-Higher Education-Service Partnerships initiative) since 2000. This initiative was funded by the Ford and Kellogg Foundations, via the Joint Education Trust in South Africa. Prof. Bringle was one of the US experts in the field of service-learning who visited South Africa on a regular basis in order to guide and assist those universities and community organizations who participated in the pilot program. He was specifically assigned to the University of the Free State (UFS) where we received the tremendous benefits of his wealth of experience, knowledge and scholarly approach to the work over a number of years. To this I attribute the fact that the UFS soon become a South African leader in the field.

Since his involvement in the CHESP initiative Prof. Bringle collaborated with the UFS in an exceptional manner. Since 2000, he has visited South Africa annually for several years, presenting workshops and having in-depth discussions on community engagement and service learning with staff and community members. He was a keynote speaker at the second Community Service Conference of the UFS in 2004. He assisted me as co-editor of the first volume of academic articles on service learning to be published in South Africa, entitled *Research and (community) service learning in South African higher education institutions* (*Acta Academica Supplementum* 3, 2005). Prof. Bringle also supervised one of the first South African PhD studies on service learning, that of my colleague Dr Luzelle Naudé of the Department of Psychology (UFS).

The notion of higher education community engagement is deeply embedded in the transformation agenda of the South African Department of Education. Service learning, as a curricular form of such engagement, has played a major role in shaping this positioning. During the development of the UFS's Policy on Community Service and Service Learning, Prof. Bringle played a decisive role in shaping the thinking of UFS management and faculty. His long-standing commitment to scholarly-based community involvement in the US helped the UFS to utilize available, reliable and well-

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considered resources of a person who has an unshakable passion for students, faculty and the community. It was, therefore, no surprise that the decision-making structures of the UFS voted unanimously to bestow an honorary doctorate on him in the year of the University's centenary celebrations in 2004.

Since 2004 Prof. Bringle has been invited as presenter at several South African workshops, training session and conferences. In addition, he has involved South African faculty (myself included) in collaborative international conference presentations, and has provided support and guidance to many.

I wish to commend Prof. Bringle for his academic and personal contribution and exceptional service to the UFS and South Africa in general. Largely as a result of his commitment, and that of a small number of other US colleagues such as Prof. Julie A. Hatcher, community engagement and service learning have grown tremendously in stature in the country. We look forward to many more years of his active involvement in the further development of these new academic fields in South Africa.

I consider Prof. Bringle a most worthy candidate for this prestigious award and know that many of my South African colleagues would agree.

Sincerely

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