

May 18-19, 2022

**ITEM 200-1604-R0522**

**Request for Authorization to Confer the Title of Professor Emeritus of Anthropology and Sociology on Dr. Michael Francisconi, The University of Montana Western**

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**THAT**

Upon the occasion of the retirement of Michael Francisconi from the faculty of The University of Montana Western, the faculty wishes to express its appreciation for his 27 years of dedicated and valued service to the University and the State of Montana by recommending that the rank of Professor Emeritus be conferred upon him/her by the Board of Regents of the Montana University System.

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**EXPLANATION**

Dr. Michael Francisconi holds a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology (1995) and an M.S. in Sociology (1982), both from the University of Oregon. He joined the faculty of what was then Western Montana College of the University of Montana in 1995, after having taught at Dine College on the Navajo reservation in Arizona (the first college established by Native Americans for Native Americans). Over the ensuing twenty-seven years he advanced to the rank of Full Professor and has consistently contributed to the growth and development of the University of Montana Western through his teaching, service, and scholarship.

Most notably, he virtually single-handedly administered the Anthropology and Sociology programs offered through the Department of History, Philosophy and Social Sciences, teaching almost all of the classes in both programs and serving as academic advisor to the students enrolled in those programs. He constructed programs of study that were flexible and creative in order to meet the standards of accreditation while ensuring that students could still complete the program within four years. This meant that Dr. Francisconi often taught overload courses or constructed classes in such a way that they might count for lower or upper-level credit depending on the specific needs of individual students. The success of his program is evident in the number of students who went on to successful careers or advanced study in graduate school. Despite the demands of maintaining his own program, he has also taken advantage of the opportunity to teach often in the campus Honors Program, wherein students have the opportunity to explore topics from a more interdisciplinary perspective.

Dr. Francisconi has also been deeply involved in departmental matters, such as curricular development and program assessment. He was an early proponent of Block scheduling for the campus and deeply involved in the University's transition to Experience One in the early 2000s. This process involved a complete overhaul of programs and teaching styles, and Dr. Francisconi embraced the opportunity to more fully integrate the benefits of experiential learning into his courses, which has continued down to the present day. For many years (before the establishment of the Sociology and Anthropology programs) Dr. Francisconi offered a number of courses in Interdisciplinary Studies to serve the broad-based degree that was our department's centerpiece. It was here that he was completely in his element. As an interdisciplinarian he rallied students from all areas of our department to the banner of multiple perspectives, to the standard of intellectual triangulation, in a relentless quest for the broad-based knowledge only an interdisciplinary approach will generate. He also served for many years as the departmental representative to the Faculty Senate, playing an important role in the shared governance of the campus especially in relation to Academic Affairs. He is a long-standing advocate in promoting diversity on campus and long served as a member of the Multicultural and International Committees. For many years he regularly organized and hosted public panels on religion and current events, and was a regular contributor to Radio Free Western, the department sponsored public affairs program on campus radio station KDWG.

In addition to his many campus contributions, Dr. Francisconi has maintained a steady scholarly output as well, publishing several books and numerous articles (often for esteemed reference series) on topics related to Cultural Anthropology, Economic Anthropology, Cultural Ecology, Political Sociology and Education, and History and Anthropology. Most recently he has been working on a study of the American Political Left in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. All of this work reflects his commitment to an interdisciplinary approach, recognizing that attention to various perspectives reinforces the conclusions drawn.

There is no better evaluation of a professor's impact on students than a testimonial from one of his students. Katherine Mallon (2006) writes of Professor Francisconi:

My first introduction to Michael Francisconi was when I read an article in the *Dillon Tribune* about a research project he had assigned to students after 9/11. I thought he seemed very innovative, very cool, and a little radical. Just my kind of person. The article inspired me to return to college to continue my sociology degree. When he walked into the classroom on that first day, he launched into an amazing, stream-of-consciousness lecture that left me breathless and a little panicked. I leaned over to one of my classmates and asked how we were supposed to take notes during the rapid-fire lecture. The classmate assured me that Michael would repeat the really key concepts. And he did. For 4 years, I took every course that Michael offered, and I learned to appreciate his style. It felt like Christmas at the beginning of each semester when I would pick up his book choices at the campus bookstore. A smart-ass student once told me that Michael didn't read any of our papers. I quickly discovered that not only did he read them, but he also often quoted them, from memory, in class. He was so supportive of our ideas and our attempts at a broader understanding of the world. With a great deal of support from my mentors in HPSS, I went on to pursue a graduate degree. At grad school, my professors were surprised and impressed at the depth of my knowledge of sociological theory. When I quoted Petr Kropotkin (with citation, from memory) on an essay exam, my professor asked, "Who TAUGHT you that in undergrad?" Michael Francisconi, that's who. PapaSconi was and is a life-changer. Always kind, always encouraging. When I started teaching in the classroom, I was overwhelmed with resistance from the students, but I remembered Michael's style: bring them along gently, don't carry a chip on your shoulder, you catch more bees with honey. Our lives are richer, kinder, and more fully human for having had him as teacher, friend, and mentor.

For all of these reasons, the Department of History, Philosophy & Social Sciences is proud to enthusiastically nominate Professor Francisconi for emeritus status.

Signed,

Aaron Weinacht, Chair  
Professor, History

Mark Krank  
Professor Emeritus, Psychology

Bill Janus  
Professor, History

John Hajduk  
Professor, History

Sean Eudaily  
Professor, Politics

Heather Haas  
Professor, Psychology

Jessica Fowler  
Assistant Professor, History

Candice Burkett  
Assistant Professor, Psychology

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## ATTACHMENTS

None