Comments on Professor Christopher Homan

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Association with Candidate: Student, Advisee

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I have known Chris Homan for over three years now. I have worked with him as both a graduate student and a colleague on my master's thesis and two research papers. We still continue to collaborate together with another RIT professor on our research and hope to submit a third paper for publication in 2007. In the Spring of 2005, I had Homan as a teacher in the graduate Complexity and Computability course (#4005-704). As such, I believe I am in a appropriate position to access his ability as an Associate Professor of Computer Science at the Rochester Institute of Technology.

1   Effectiveness as a Teacher

I was quite comfortable with Chris' teaching style during the Complexity course. Instead of using passive presentations, Homan actively engaged the class with the problems and worked out the fundamentals on the board. He always took the time during the class to review any difficulties that the students had with the homework assignments. Chris also has the ability to explain and discuss problems in these areas in such a way that does not overwhelm his students.

Chris also challenged the class with many problems in homework assignments and warm-up exercises. I felt that this was especially important in a course like Complexity and Computability because the best way to learn how to write proofs and solve these types of problems was to keep practicing.

The class was always informed about their progress and the status of the class through a course website setup by Chris and updated throughout the semester. Chris followed the lecture notes from the Complexity class that he took with his graduate advisor at UofR.

2   Knowledge of Subject Matter

There are three domains on which I can comment on Homan's knowledge of a particular subject matter. Foremost, as a teacher and a lecturer, Chris is well learned in computer science theory. Although the material that was covered in his class was introductionary, he certainly showed mastery of the material.

As my advisor for my master's thesis in graph visualization, Chris did an excellent job at sheparding me through the entire research process. My thesis was particularly challenging for Homan because we were both new this area of computer science; Chris had a strong interest in this field and took me on as student even though it was not clear right away what the end result would be. He guided me through the literature and provided assistance in developing our

experimental visualization system. Chris' strong background in mathematics was also key in helping me complete the project.

Lastly, Chris' mentoring was indispensable in helping me to pursue an advanced degree in computer science after I graduated from RIT. Because RIT is more career focused, I found it difficult to get advice from RIT professors about how to get accepted to a different graduate school to continue my education. Many of RIT's computer science faculty received their degrees outside of the United States or had graduated many years, and thus were a limited help to me. Chris on the other hand provided me with useful information based on his recent experiences as a Ph.D. student.

3 Class Preparation

It has been almost two years since the Complexity class, and thus it is difficult for me to remember how well prepared Chris was for class. After consulting with another student that took this class with me at the same time, we remember Homan almost always being completely prepared for class. This can possibly be attributed this to Chris' strong adherence to the syllabus that was given to the class at the beginning of the term. There was never an ambiguous and confusing discussion about what the next chapter in class would be or when the exams would be held. While Chris always had a clear lesson plan for each class during the week, he was flexible to allow for review time on topics that the students requested.

The only negative aspect of Chris' class that I remember is that he was sometimes tardy in returning graded homework assignments. Admittedly though, the class was full, Chris did not have a grader, and the class was assigned weekly homework problems. These assignments were always returned to the students in batches; that is, rather than returning the previous week's assignments every week, Chris would give us back two to three week's worth of work at the same time. The exams were always graded and returned in a reasonable time.

4 Concern for the Individual Student

As his student, I felt that Homan went beyond the norm for making himself accessible to his pupils. He was always available to answer questions regarding homework assignments during office hours, as well as after class on his own personal time. Before the final exam, Homan also held a review session where students could ask for additional help on the course material. All during these extra study sessions and reviews, there was a definite sense from those of us that took advantage of Homan's help that he was committed to making sure that we understood this material. Two years later, I remember this time as being one of my more positive educational experiences at RIT.

5 Other Personal Traits

Certainly Chris is not without his flaws. In dealing with him as an advisor, I often found it frustrating that he would not read drafts of my thesis and return edits in a timely manner. Another student also confided to me about having a similar problem. Early in the thesis process, Homan was available almost anytime. During the summer vacation months, I would often meet with him at his house to discuss the progress of my thesis or get help for problems that may I have been stuck on. But once I finished my research and began to actually write my thesis, Chris was slow in returning back draft edits and comments.

In hindsight, I believe that the attention I received from him during the entire thesis process was well beyond what I have seen in academia since I have left RIT.

I must also add that Chris' work ethic is unparalleled, especially when there is a paper submission deadline due in the near future. For example, Chris and I worked together for over 14 hours a day for an entire week last June when we submitted our second research paper to the Graph Drawing Symposium.

6 Other Comments

I am thankful that I had the opportunity to work with Chris Homan before I left RIT. He taught me so much more than just the lecture material in a 10 week course. From Chris I learned how to conduct serious computer science research. This involves many skill areas: how to write a research paper, how to use LaTeX, and how to compose algorithms in such a way that is comprehensible to the average computer scientist. Chris pushed me to become a stronger writer and refused to let me submit a thesis until he thought that it was the best that it could be.

I could not have asked for a better mentor or advisor while attending RIT.