

Dear U.S. Professors of the Year Program Selection Committee,

I cannot overemphasize Dr. Wesch's positive impact on the lives of his students- it is an honor to write about Dr. Wesch and his unique, powerful and truly inspiring teaching.

To discuss Dr. Wesch's current dedication to teaching thoroughly, I must describe how innovative and thoughtful he was when I began my first anthropology course in Introduction to Cultural Anthropology. Although this was only my second semester in college, I had already grown weary of big lecture classes as I felt the professors seemed detached and disinterested in the student's learning. I was pleasantly surprised, to say the very least, that Professor Wesch was excited and ready to help all of us learn and grow as individuals. The excitement was contagious! His use of technology was more than impressive. Not only was it appropriate and applicable to what we were learning about in class, it made the introductory material come alive. To this day, I can still remember nearly everything taught in that class, which is a phenomenal achievement for any college student who has become accustomed to the traditional "regurgitate and forget" test method. Although early in the morning, my peers and I came into class eager to learn. One of Dr. Wesch's greatest strengths is his ability to turn complicated, high-end theory into something tangible- his famous world simulation project allows hundreds of students to create their own cultures then simulate how the world works and where we might go as a "global village."

In my junior year, I was privileged enough to take Dr. Wesch's Religion in Culture course. At this point, my expectations of Wesch were practically unreachable, as he had already proven himself to be my all time favorite professor. Not surprisingly, Professor Wesch surpassed my expectations and managed to spark such an interest within me that I changed my entire world view, and major, in one semester! The class had an inviting and open atmosphere that enabled students to ask sincerely profound and intriguing questions. While the topics we discussed were inherently delicate, Dr. Wesch was a superb facilitator and knew how to lead the class in a way that was maximally insightful for everyone. As I look back, the reason why these ideas were so difficult is that we were actually challenging our own internal biases and presumptions. Even today, I am able to use the tools acquired from this class and apply them to every area of my life. The class was set up so the students were able to post responses to readings and have an "online debate" through K-State's online communication network (K-State Online). This may sound typical of an upper level class, but what makes it really extraordinary is that Wesch would comment right along with us, enhancing that feeling of mutual learning. Then, he posted relevant videos and articles to solidify the topics discussed in class and the message board. I can only imagine how many extra hours Wesch put in searching for and modifying videos for the class!

Furthermore, his feedback was nearly instantaneous. Whether through the message board, e-mail or in person, he actually listened and responded with solid professional advice. He has a remarkable ability to critique and praise any comments, questions or revelations and turn it into a learning experience.

While I came into the class searching for answers, I left understanding what questions I still needed to ask. I felt, and I am not alone on this, that Wesch was taking the journey with us rather than forcing us through. Of course he had certain theorists and concepts he needed to relay, but he did it in such a way that was truly fascinating; in essence, he helped us realize the significance of the subject matter. For this reason alone I applaud Dr. Wesch. So often I hear classmates ask, "Why is this relevant *to me*?" Professor Wesch showed us that by using the "ethnographer's toolkit," we can open up new avenues and have a positive impact on the

world. I realize this may sound idealistic, but it is difficult to write about how moving Dr. Wesch's teaching is without sounding fanatical. After every class period, I immediately called or emailed my family to keep them updated on what was happening in Wesch's classes. In fact, at my behest, my dad started reading the works of one of our theorists (Joseph Campbell) and my brother started reading another (Karen Armstrong). In a short amount of time, Professor Wesch had so inspired me that I had my family, roommates and friends wanting to know everything about his classes!

Admittedly, I strive to achieve top grades. Dr. Wesch's classes were the *only* courses taken thus far that would still have been worth taking had I received a failing grade. The reason for this is that Professor Wesch stresses the importance of individual learning rather than a meaningless game of grades, as he might say. He creates an atmosphere that is conducive to individual growth and achievement.

Since my adoption of anthropology as a major, I have worked for Dr. Wesch for three semesters and have taken his Anthropological Theory and Digital Ethnography courses. This has given me an incredible opportunity to watch his teaching develop and mature over time. He is positively relentless in his search for new and innovative ways to reach his students. As his teacher's assistant for Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, I am currently amazed at what a class of two-hundred students can create online, with his guidance. The students are using online resources that allow them to upload videos, add text and edit content collaboratively as well as bookmark and highlight relevant webpages. For instance, on the class "wiki," students can collectively edit lecture notes, and group cultures (created for the World Simulation project) can communicate with each other using web documents. A specific culture may live in a tropical rainforest environment so group members add links to a "real world" environment such as Papua New Guinea, then add related information dealing with subsistence patterns, religion, marriage practices, etc. Through this, they decide what may or may not fit in with their mock culture, and then write up their ideas!

Further, I am dually amazed at what we are learning in Digital Ethnography. A "jack of all trades," Dr. Wesch seems to know something about everything, or at the very least, he knows where to find it. With his leadership, a group of eight students with little technological expertise have been able to create high quality videos in a matter of weeks; not to mention the world-wide recognition he has brought to the class! The structure of the class is intimate and flexible, and we are learning about the online world as rapidly as that world is changing. Dr. Wesch is incredibly encouraging- when he says he's proud of our work, we know he means it. He inspires us to see the "big picture" and explore our inner creativity and vision. By cultivating these essential skills, Professor Wesch is setting us up to succeed after graduation. His dedication to our academic, professional and personal success is commendable and appreciated.

Dr. Wesch is, hands down, the most inspiring, knowledgeable, and compassionate individual I have ever met. His willingness to give to his students and desire to help them learn is unmatched by any other professor. I now have an unrelenting, unquenchable desire to learn more, and I cannot think of any greater accomplishment on the part of a professor.



Jessie Stone
Senior in Anthropology