

Endorsement for **Susan Burns**
Luce Fellowship

I take great pleasure in presenting this college's institutional endorsement of Susan Burns. Her performance at Williams College was both excellent and eclectic, and, as you will see, I am very enthusiastic about her candidacy for a Henry Luce Fellowship. In fact, I might as well admit right now that Susan strikes me as the strongest candidate I have endorsed for this competition since I came into this office in 1992.

First let me summarize some of Susan's accomplishments. She graduated *Summa Cum Laude* with a cumulative grade-point average of 3.92, with Highest Honors in Biology. Over her last three semesters, her grades averaged out to 4.03. She was elected to *Phi Beta Kappa* at the end of her junior year. She won a Barry Goldwater Fellowship. In addition to her rigorous Biology major, she took advanced courses in English, History, and Chemistry. She was active in athletics, and very important in building mutual understanding and community on this campus. She has traveled extensively, but not in eastern Asia. Her overall record at Williams is unsurpassed in my experience.

To tell you this, however, hardly begins to describe Susan. Her letters of recommendation certainly do paint a more complete picture of her. Let me note that I think these recommendations are, not only in their enthusiasm but in their extensiveness and copiousness, extraordinary. The letter from John James taught me a lot about Susan's background even as it confirmed many of my brighter suspicions about her. The letter from Prof. Jones, perhaps our most distinguished Biologist, is also remarkable. Prof. Jones is a devotee of the understatement and usually rather curt. I have never seen her so enthusiastic about a candidate.

The academic references, however, exercise a scientific rigor and restraint that a dean is not always obliged to espouse. These references are, with the possible exception of James, perhaps a bit underdeveloped in discussing Susan's character and style. Therefore I would like a minute to discuss those aspects of her.

Susan is even more impressive in person than she is on paper. She is a very direct, mature, intense and yet considerate young woman. She has a great deal of dignity and a great deal of something very rare in someone of her age: real gravity, a kind of weight of intellect and of engagement that made me almost uncomfortable the first time I met her and then more and more impressed as I got to know her better. I can still remember when a very sophisticated artist helped me interview and how easily he saw through the guiles and strategies of most of the students we met. But he couldn't get over Susan's brilliance and the unconscious charm and dignity with which she had encountered a professor she had never met before. All in all, I might sum it up by saying that Susan has real *presence*, a consummate presence that holds no commerce with conceit or arrogance or manipulativeness. She is an honest, brilliant, engaging and highly engaged young woman.

The quality of her engagement is in evidence as I write. She has worked diligently on her application and there is no need for me to contact her about details. That's just as well, because right now she is *incommunicada*, absorbed in her field work in the Amazonian rain forest, as she has been all semester. This strikes me as field work with a vengeance; research in a fascinating place totally devoid of convenience and comfort, home, no doubt to a hundred dangers. This is the sort of thing that convinces me that Susan has chosen her career carefully but surely and that she will progress brilliantly along her chosen path. She is already a totally committed and accomplished professional.

Susan also has a deep interest in people. I think you will see that immediately when you meet her. At Williams she was conspicuous for her concern for the underdog, her protection of the vulnerable. She is a woman of very high moral character and it is a kinetic and productive moral character. She is morally active, but approachable and unintimidating. I am sure that with her friendly, attractive manner she will make acquaintances easily in Asia.

She is sensitive to difference, but extremely accepting of it. She is also intrepid. A foreign culture may seem intimidating and strange, but Susan is at home in the rain forest. Her history of experiment and travel show that she not easily daunted.

Were I a scientist, I could tell you more. All my experience can tell me is that when such substantial intelligence is joined to such obvious engagement, great success is a likely consequence. Colleagues here support Susan's application strongly. The Campus Selection Committee, comprising three experts in Asian Studies reached a fairly rare unanimity regarding Susan, and with an enthusiasm very rare indeed in my experience.

We present her to you as one of our very best, as the perfect representative of the ideals this college seeks to propagate.

Sincerely,