

*Recommendation for John W. Black for a Rhodes Scholarship*

To the Rhodes Selection Committee:

I have known John Black well since the spring of his first year at Williams College. I taught him in two courses, advised him on academic matters, and worked closely with him in my capacity as chair of his major department (English). I believe he is an outstanding candidate for a Rhodes Scholarship, and I take great pleasure in recommending him.

John was among the most distinguished members of the class Williams graduated in June 1997. He received his degree *magna cum laude*; was elected to Phi Beta Kappa; and was on the Dean's List every term. He was also among the most respected English majors we've had in recent years. The distinction of his work in our department earned him appointment during his senior year to our Class of 1960 Scholars Program--a small group of our best majors who meet for special seminars with visiting critics and writers.

I first taught John during his freshman year in a course on the history of the novel. He had excellent literary instincts, and his papers and exams were impressive; but he was, at that point, only beginning to develop his own critical voice and to understand how to construct complex forms of argument. But by the time I taught him again, during his junior year, in my advanced course on "Samuel Johnson and the Literary Tradition," John had attained a remarkable degree of critical sophistication and maturity. His papers were gracefully and lucidly written, cogently argued, and carefully organized. They demonstrated that John had developed a refined aesthetic sensibility, the ability to make complex discriminations (of argument and value), and an unusual gift for synthesizing and explaining difficult ideas.

I was equally impressed by John's truly distinguished performance in classroom discussions. His contributions--precisely formulated and eloquently spoken--would invariably elevate the argument to higher levels. He listened carefully and attended thoughtfully to the views of others, and had an instinctive knack for knowing exactly when and how to contribute to discussions.

In all of his academic work, John has shown himself to be a rigorous thinker, with a keen eye for significant detail, and a subtle understanding of the nuances of tone, narrative voice, and metaphor. He is intellectually courageous--unafraid to take on (in class discussions, in papers, in conversation) the most demanding questions and issues. I admire, too, John's sense of critical balance--his mature ability to be passionate and enthusiastic about writers, and at the same time, to establish and maintain the sorts of critical distance one needs to judge them intelligently.

I have no doubt, then, that John's intellectual talents equip him superbly for the academic opportunities a Rhodes Scholarship would provide. John has demonstrated such a high degree of intellectual initiative and independence that he is sure to flourish in the educational system at Oxford.

I wish to comment also on John's contributions to our department and college. John inspires trust. His judgment and integrity were deeply valued by his fellow students and teachers, who repeatedly asked him to take on sensitive duties at Williams. He was elected by his fellow students, for example, to serve as "Senior Advisor"--a peer academic advising program here. In the English Department, he was twice appointed by the faculty to serve on our Majors Committee

(a small group of students who work with the faculty on various departmental issues), and during his senior year, to serve on our Curriculum Committee and on our committee to select new faculty. In all these important roles, John's work was outstanding. I was greatly impressed by his leadership abilities, by his steadiness of judgment, by his thoughtfulness and discernment, and by his ambitiousness in imagining new ways to organize and conduct the department's affairs.

I should also mention that John is a wonderful singer. He participated in (and in many cases organized and led) several different singing groups on campus.

John is an exceptionally appealing and admirable person. He is unfailingly polite, considerate, and modest. He has a wonderful sense of humor. He is honest and trustworthy in every way. He works easily and well with people of all ages and backgrounds.

For all these reasons, I believe John to be an outstanding candidate for a Rhodes Scholarship. I recommend him with the greatest confidence and enthusiasm.

Sincerely yours,