

Office of the Dean

College of Education  
38 Education Building, MC-708  
1310 South Sixth Street  
Champaign, IL 61820-6990

2/21/2005

Dear Members of the Faculty/Staff Awards Committee,

When you mention John Barclay to folks in the College of Education the reaction usually falls into one of two categories - they either say "Who's that?" or they laugh. Both strike me as indicators of just how great a job John does for us. As the College webmaster/programmer/application developer/technical wizard, John is either invisible to most consumers of web and software services in the building, or, you've been in his office with some kind of problem. If you don't know who he is that means all of the things he's created or maintains (the Faculty-Staff Database, the Online Annual Reports, the College website, the interface that downloads the campus course catalog to individual department sites, the list is huge) are working exactly like they should be. If they aren't, then you've been to John with a complaint or a problem. And he's solved it. He always solves it. It doesn't matter what the problem is. It doesn't matter who's bringing it to him.

I had the opportunity to work fairly closely with John for a couple of years while the College went through a complete redesign and rebuild of our website. The effort was immense and required the active participation of faculty, staff, students and alumni at all stages of the project. Input and opinion from all over the College was solicited, debated and put together in a new appearance for the site, as well as plans for entirely new tools for managing the site content. Then, basically, we handed it to John and said, "Hey, make this happen." So, just to retrace - a number of really large committees created a really large plan, full of entirely new ideas and demands and then gave it to one guy to make it a reality.

Now, that's oversimplifying the case a bit and John did work as part of a team of OET staff. Credit for the success of the effort goes to a number of people. But, to be honest, the bulk of the programming to make some great ideas a great product fell squarely on his shoulders. And, over the entire length of the project, through weekly (and often, more than weekly) meetings I never, ever heard him say "No. We can't do that" Instead, what I heard, in the face of our often unreasonable requests, was simply "Sure. We can do that. We can do anything you want." And here's the really amazing part - he meant it.

I watched as John faced challenge after challenge (some technical, some human) and worked through each of them, step by step, and then checked them off his extremely long list. And, that, in my experience, is how John works on any project he tackles for the College - from small to large. He works out what needs to be done and figures out how to make it happen. And, just to make sure someone else can figure it out again later - he carefully documents everything along the way. Problem comes in. Problem gets solved. Repeat as necessary. Add an offbeat sense of humor and a bread machine as necessary.

Now, while John's technical abilities are impressive, I really believe that his greatest strength is his absolute refusal to simply "put out technical fires." John doesn't just look for the easiest way to fix a problem - the way that will get an angry communications specialist out of his office the fastest. Rather, he looks for a solution that will work best in the long term - for the individual and for the College. This sounds like common sense - really, it sounds like going the doctor. But, in practice, in the real world, this level of customer service is one of the rarest and most valuable qualities we ever encounter. *It's not giving the customer what he or she wants - it's giving them what they really need.* It takes a lot of commitment and a respectable amount of courage to tell your boss (or his boss, or the dean) "Now, let's hold up a second and think about this." I've seen John do it repeatedly. And, you can figure out who's been in that office and had that experience - those are the people who laugh when they hear John's name. Quite a testament to someone who will tell you flat out "That's

probably not the way you want to go on that"

Basically, I describe John Barclay as one the "heavy lifters" in the College of Education. He's one of those people who shows up and spends every day doing things that add value for our faculty, staff and students. He doesn't demand attention and doesn't ask for much beyond an occasional doughnut and the freedom to try out new ideas. And, down in his basement office or from his home on the weekends or in the middle of room 160, he quietly goes about making small miracles that pretty much all of us here in the College take for granted. In my opinion, that's the sign of an outstanding contributor to an organization and the trademark of Academic Professional Excellence Award recipients. That's John Barclay.

Sincerely,  
Chris Harris  
Communications Specialist  
244-8335