

Application for Promotion to
Distinguished Professor

CHARLES BENEKE
University of Akron
Myers School of Art
Professor of Art
Printmaking Area Coordinator
Assistant Director
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Student Letters of Support

To navigate to individual letters click on names.

- **River Butcher '05**
Comedian, writer, producer featured on Comedy Central, Conan, HBO, and Ellen.
- **Sarah Ellis '14**
Jacksonville State University, Assistant Professor of Printmaking, Acting University General Education Director
- **Stevie Lee Tanner '14**
Cleveland Institute of Art, Printmaking Studio Manager/Adjunct Faculty
- **Chad Uehlein '17**
University of Akron, Myers School of Art BFA with Printmaking Emphasis Graduate
- **Anna E. Young '14**
University of Akron, Myers School of Art, Assistant Lecturer—Foundations 2D Design, Kink Contemporary, Founder

To Whomever It May Concern:

My name is River Butcher and I am writing on behalf of Professor Charles Beneke, for his application for the rank of Distinguished Professor at The University of Akron. It is my utmost honor to be asked to write on his behalf. I am a graduate of The Myers School of Art at The University of Akron with a BFA in Printmaking, minor in Painting, class of 2005. I currently reside in Los Angeles and have worked for the past 12 years in television, movies, and stand up comedy. I have created and starred in my own television show, Take My Wife. I've been featured on Comedy Central, Conan, HBO, and Ellen for my stand up comedy. I have written for the tv series A League of Their Own, and wrote and produced a pilot for FX called Belated. I've also put out numerous stand up specials of my own material.

Charles Beneke's approach to teaching has had a profound impact on me and my life and my career in the arts. It is not hyperbole for me to say that I would not be where I am today had I not studied under Charles' direction, and been given abundant creative opportunities as a student and as an artist by his classes. He was also my advisor for my senior project and recommended me for a Dean search committee as a student representative. Charles has a keen ability to see creative and artistic potential in all students, but especially in those who could have a career in the arts. Under his direction in 101 classes like 2d Design and Drawing 2, we were guided to think outside of the box in terms of performance and space and atmosphere, ideas that planted the seeds of performance art for me as a student.

Charles has a basic trust in his students and their willingness to create. He pairs that trust with his own desire to seek out fulfilling modes of creation, whether it is implementing digital printing techniques or using almost antiquated forms like photogravure, to capture the world around us and to evoke the divine spark of creativity through our experiences. His consistent invitation to view and participate in his own work, whether it was work in progress in the studio alongside us, or his gallery shows, he continually presented a future for us to experience as working artists and the potential of what that could look like.

Finally, as a young queer person in the early 2000's, Charles was one of a few professors on campus who very prominently displayed a flier in his office window indicating that he was a safe person to be openly queer around. This was not something that I had ever experienced in my life coming from a Catholic school background, and 24 years ago was a major act of courage on his part. This love and clear, public support had a profound and early affect on my acceptance of myself as queer and the possibility that I could not only be an artist but I could be my full, true self as an artist and that others would support me; that I would not be alone. I feel that this simple action is one that describes Charles' teaching completely in it's support, tenderness, and generosity.

It is with my entire heart that I recommend Charles Beneke for Distinguished Professor.

River Butcher
Class of '05

March 17, 2024

Committee Members,

I am honored to write in support of Professor Charles Beneke for promotion to rank of Distinguished Professor. In his 23 years at The University of Akron, he has demonstrated that he is committed to creating an exemplary learning environment for his students, sustaining his own challenging creative activity, and providing an extraordinary amount of service to the institution and to the greater printmaking community at large. I will speak about my own experience with Professor Beneke as a mentor since 2012. I feel that his impressive CV speaks for itself, so I'd like to highlight his pedagogy, advocacy, and service within the printmaking field.

I graduated from the University of Akron with a BFA in Printmaking in 2014. Charles was one of my main mentors, along with other wonderful faculty at Myers. As my academic career progressed, I was so inspired by his active visiting artist program (thINKeditions) and his participation in the greater global printmaking community. He always encouraged his students to attend conferences, participate in campus organizations, and submit their work to various exhibitions. In many ways, he was the blueprint within Printmaking for me regarding best practices, pedagogy, and artistic professionalism. I watched him foster healthy, supportive connections with other printmakers across the United States. He supported me in my endeavor to go to graduate school and I received several full-tuition scholarships for various MFA programs around the country. I attended graduate school and received my MFA from the University of North Texas in 2018. I was delighted when I was invited back to be an artist for thINKeditions in 2020. This full-circle moment really allowed me to revel in working with the printmaking students at the University of Akron and it truly has been one of the highlights of my career.

During graduate school, Charles reached out to me with a nomination for a board position within Southern Graphics Council International. This highly esteemed printmaking organization was already important to me as a student, but the opportunity to participate in its leadership really defined my career trajectory in a major way. We worked together for almost 5 years on the board and in that time I saw a man who practiced radical empathy. He loudly and pointedly advocated for marginalized voices within the printmaking community. I had known this was his practice as my professor, but to see him unafraid to have difficult conversations that de-centered the "legacy" of white male printmakers in the organization was inspiring, especially as a woman within the LGBTQ+ community.

He also became a proactive voice of advocacy during the early stages of COVID-19 when we were planning an annual SGCI conference in Puerto Rico. I still remember the day in early March 2020 that he made the incredibly difficult decision to postpone the conference indefinitely as the President of SGCI. This was years and years of work that came to a screeching halt — not an easy decision, to put it mildly. The Board had been fielding phone calls and text messages amongst ourselves all day as the news cycle seemed a harbinger for things to get exponentially worse. We were all around the United States and our institutions were dealing with things in very different ways. One thing was clear: the conference in Puerto Rico had the possibility to bring the first cases of COVID-19 to a place that was already historically fraught with crises imposed by the United States.

Many members of the organization were upset at the cancellation as this preceded the declaration of COVID-19 as a national emergency and there were no travel bans in place. Charles recognized the potential of what 800+ visitors from around the world in Puerto Rico could mean in terms of compromising the health and wellness of the local community and he did not believe it was ethical to carry out the conference, no matter what. He clearly and compassionately put the people of Puerto Rico before any other interests. Shortly after this decision was made and as Charles and the rest of the board were navigating the impact of such a cancellation, COVID-19 was declared a national emergency and lockdown began. In the wake of this, Charles and the SGCI Board devised ways to reimburse members of the organization while not financially impacting the hosts in Puerto Rico. Specifically, Charles was concerned about making sure that the student membership was reimbursed as fully as possible. It was an incredible amount of time and emotional labor, but Charles never complained and we were all just happy that our extended printmaking family was able to stay as safe as possible.

I see these actions as a clear extension of service to Professor Beneke's field. What worth does our work even have in the arts and humanities if we don't hold space and compassion for others? From my perspective, this has been his sustained practice: supporting both the local and global community in any way that he can. From outreach and planning events with the Akron Art Museum to serving as a board member for Mid America Print Council, he makes sure that printmaking is for everyone who wants to participate. I even recall a summer class I took with him where he would make his students breakfast once a

week. This ensured that folks were eating (something that art students are notoriously bad at) and it also created a sense of community for everyone in that space.

In my current role, I am finishing my fourth year as a tenure-track Assistant Professor of Printmaking at Jacksonville State University in Alabama. I am also serving as an administrator within our General Education program for the university at large. Following in Professor Beneke's footsteps, a crucial part of my own pedagogy is creating a reciprocal learning environment. I believe that you can only do so much as an educator unless you consistently listen to the feedback of your students and build an inclusive space that supports everyone. In this semester alone, two of my printmaking students have been accepted to prestigious MFA programs. I can say with confidence that Charles set an incredible example of what mentorship can help our students accomplish. I am so proud to be part of his legacy and I hope to pay all of his kindness forward to future generations of students. I was very lucky to call him my professor and am even luckier to now call him a friend and colleague within our community.

I cannot overstate the profound impact that Professor Beneke had on my academic experience and career. If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me at scellis@jsu.edu or 740-504-8195.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Ellis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sarah Ellis
Assistant Professor of Printmaking
Acting University General Education Director
Jacksonville State University

March 22, 2023

Stevie Lee Tanner

Printmaking Studio Manager/Adjunct Faculty
Cleveland Institute of Art
UA Myers Alum '14, Printmaking, Painting & Drawing

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Dear Evaluating Committee,

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for Charles Beneke's Promotion to Distinguished Professor. I have known Charles for 12 years in various capacities of teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend.

In his teaching, Charles leads with respect and empathy. He has a unique ability to challenge students to improve their work while simultaneously nurturing confidence in their output. Students are not afraid to fail in Charles's classes, and they feel that their artistic voice is being heard. This was extremely important to me personally, as I came to Myers as a non-traditional student (first generation & transfer student) and at times I really struggled to find my way. As I have seen him do with many other students, Charles met me where I was at, and encouraged me to take ownership of my failures and successes by providing a creative and supportive environment.

As evidenced by his CV, Charles's professional activities are impressive, and he is very well known & respected in the contemporary printmaking community. I can say from personal experience that these activities and professional connections directly transfer into his classroom and leave a significant impact on his students. Some examples include Exhibitions, ThinkINK Editions program, and his leadership in national & international printmaking organizations. His students get a real world understanding of the field, and gain professional relationships that often last well beyond graduation. In other words, his students are able to not only visualize, but begin to build their own professional practice through modeling & hands-on learning.

In summary, Charles is a fantastic candidate for the title of Distinguished Professor because he shares his professional accomplishments with his students in a meaningful way. Myers School of Art is lucky to have him, and he certainly shaped my own experience at Myers and beyond.

Thank you,



Stevie Lee Tanner

March 14th, 2024

Dear University of Akron Collective Bargaining Committee,

It is my pleasure to express my full support of Charles Beneke in his promotion to the rank of Distinguished Professor at the University of Akron's Myers School of Art. As a graduate of the Myers School of Art's printmaking program, I had the opportunity to have Charles Beneke as my professor for four years. Charles was a phenomenal teacher; he was incredibly thorough & engaging in class, provided helpful opportunities that extended beyond the classroom, and was a supportive figurehead in furthering my academic career.

As an older student returning to college after a few years, Charles' welcoming personality fostered an open & inclusive environment in the Myers School of Art print shop that helped me make friends & feel comfortable opening up with others. His dedication in being both an academic & an artist is apparent in the way he engaged the classroom during demonstrations & gave earnest feedback in critiques & on projects. In addition to his own teaching, Charles went out of his way to bring numerous visiting artists across a number of backgrounds into the classroom. Many of these artists not only lectured or critiqued but created artwork with our assistance, which brought real-life experience & inspiration that was indispensable to me as a student.

Moreover, there were a number of opportunities outside of campus that were invaluable in my growth. As a member of academic printmaking organizations like Southern Graphics Council International, Charles brought students to a number of academic conferences across the country. These conferences allowed us to network with artists across the world and students & faculty from other Universities, some of which I'm still friends with to this day. Towards the end of my time at Myers School of Art, Charles was incredibly supportive as the head of my senior portfolio review committee & was a driving force behind my confidence in applying to graduate school. Not only did Charles go out of his way to offer advice throughout the process, but I believe many of the opportunities & experiences that Charles offered me throughout my time at the University of Akron were a defining factor in my success at receiving a full tuition merit scholarship to the University of Connecticut.

I find myself extremely lucky to call Charles Beneke not only my teacher, but one of the most influential mentors I've had the opportunity to work with. His teaching & support has played a pivotal role in my success as an undergraduate student, and his guidance has stayed with me in spirit while obtaining my graduate degree & teaching my own printmaking classes. I have no doubt that Charles is a professor who puts everything into his own work, while also helping others achieve & exceed their own goals. I look forward to seeing him receive the rank of Distinguished Professor. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Chad Uehlein
University of Connecticut, MFA '22
University of Akron, BFA '17
theuehlein@gmail.com
440-453-3019

March 19, 2024

Dear Distinguished Professor Review Committee,

I am pleased to enthusiastically recommend Charles Beneke for the rank of Distinguished Professor at the University of Akron. As his former student and now colleague, I have witnessed firsthand his exceptional contributions to the field of art and printmaking and his unwavering dedication to teaching and mentorship.

Charles is an accomplished artist and printmaker and inspired me to continue my studies at the University of Akron and become the artist and professional I am now. His innovative approach to teaching, combined with his unending understanding of artistic techniques and theories, has consistently elevated the learning experience for students in his classes.

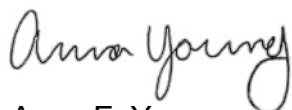
Charles is highly encouraging. When frustrated with a process in the printmaking studio, he always provided different ways of approaching an assignment with patience and abundant support. His wealth of expertise made it easy to explore many processes, making his class exciting and energizing. He motivates his students by utilizing his unique point of view and immense mutual respect.

Beyond the classroom, Charles Beneke has made significant contributions to the advancement of art and printmaking through his extensive work focused on the landscape and environmental preservation. His artistic perspective on climate change and how he brings awareness to such an important topic is incredibly inspiring. His printmaking process is characterized by a unique blend of technical mastery, conceptual depth, and aesthetic innovation, earning him widespread acclaim nationally and internationally.

Without reservation, Charles Beneke would be an excellent fit for the rank of Distinguished Professor. As a professional artist, advocate, teacher, and, at present, my colleague, he deserves this honor.

Feel free to contact me at 330-469-1273 or ae2@uakron.edu if you have any questions or would like me to further elaborate on Charles Beneke's talents and achievements.

Sincerely,



Anna E. Young
Assistant Lecturer, Foundations 2D Design