**LETTER OF APPLICATION**

October 3, 20XX

Dr. Thomas Lisle

Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Knox College

2 East South Street

Galesburg, IL 61401-4999

Dear Dr. Lisle,

I am writing to apply for the tenure track, assistant professor position in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. I will receive my Ph.D. in March 20XX from the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago. Given my specializations in qualitative methods, urban sociology and social policy and my strong preference for teaching in a liberal arts environment, I feel I am well suited for the position.

My dissertation, entitled *Reforming Poor Women: Identity Shaping and the Cultural Politics and* *Practices of Welfare Reform,* is a comparative ethnographic study of welfare reform as it unfolds in twoneighborhood welfare-to-work organizations in poor, predominantly minority areas of Chicago. Like other organizations charged with implementing work-based welfare reform, these agencies perform what I call “cultural retraining” in the job-readiness and “soft skills” workshops they run for welfare recipients.

Cultural retraining, I contend, aims at correcting the individual pathologies endemic to the so-called “culture of poverty” (e.g. laziness, lack of work ethic, moral laxity). Through teaching mainstream norms about discipline, dress, language, and demeanor (many of these lessons have strong racial overtones), these welfare-to-work programs seek to make productive workers out of welfare recipients—a group presumed by policymakers and the public to lack the qualities of good workers.

Though public welfare has long been seen by sociologists as a means of social control of the poor, recent reforms to the welfare system intensify this function.

In *Reforming Poor Women* I approach welfare reform from multiple levels of analysis. I use ethnography to explore the everyday lived experience of welfare reform as it unfolds in these implementing organizations. I also employ administrative data from the Illinois Department of Human Services (the state welfare agency in Illinois), interviews with upper-level administrators from IDHS, and extensive fieldwork at the Chicago Jobs Council, an umbrella organization for welfare-to-work programs. This multi-level methodology allows me to address welfare reform at the state policy level and at the level of community-based welfare organizations. By analyzing the radical changes in state welfare policy, the accompanying changes in the mission and operation of community-based providers, and the impact these changes have on the everyday lives of poor women, I provide a fully contextualized and policy-relevant account of welfare reform in Chicago.

While at the University of Chicago, I have taught four classes (ranging in size from two to fifty students) and assisted in the teaching and design of five others. In the three urban poverty classes I taught, I have used a variety of teaching methods. In addition to class readings and discussions, I have taken my students on field trips through South Chicago—where Chicago’s steel mills once operated—and other impoverished areas in Chicago. On one such trip we spoke with a man who used to work at a mill about how his life and the life of the neighborhood had changed since the mills shut down. I have found that such hands-on learning outside the classroom can be valuable in discussions of potentially abstract concepts like “deindustrialization.” In addition to field trips, I have included movies, census and budget information, and current events in this course to widen its scope. Likewise, I encourage students to do independent scholarly or volunteer work. One of my students collected life histories of several *Streetwise* (a newspaper that homeless men and women sell) vendors. Others engaged in service learning in a food pantry and an organization that connects poor women to non-traditional jobs.

I most enjoy teaching about social inequalities and social problems, areas I have emphasized in the three urban poverty courses I have taught. Teaching against pervasive beliefs about, for instance, the openness of America society and the presumed disappearance of racial discrimination is invaluable in developing critical thinkers and responsible citizens. I also enjoy teaching about public policy and social change, areas in which students can deploy sociological analysis to both understand and change the social problems we explore in class.

On a personal level, I think it is important to be committed to one’s academic community. Having been closely involved with the Public Policy program now for five academic years as a teacher and BA thesis advisor, I have worked individually with many of our students. Watching these young women and men grow into thoughtful social policy analysts has been an immensely rewarding experience for me. This past year, for instance, I worked closely with a former student of mine on her thesis, “Structural Adjustment in Ghana,” a paper that she hopes to publish in her home country. I have had several students with whom I have acted in a wide variety of roles—as instructor, counselor, writing tutor, fieldwork advisor, collaborator, and friend. My scholarly and personal engagement in these roles has provided me with some of my fondest memories.

I eagerly welcome a chance to speak with you further. I have included a copy of my vita, two writing samples and evidence of my teaching ability for your review. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Charles Adams