



## SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

### MAXWELL SCHOOL OF CITIZENSHIP AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

*Department of Public Administration and International Affairs*

September 7, 2012

Dear Sean:

I wanted to provide you with some feedback on your performance as a teaching assistant (TA) for the summer 2012 course, PPA 755: Public Administration & Democracy. I thought your work was stellar, from the moment you began to assist with the course design to your teaching and the closure of the course. You were an excellent TA and consistently demonstrated both your academic and teaching abilities.

I found your contributions to the course design to be very valuable. Your work helping to select readings and plan class sessions was instrumental in developing an engaging and robust course. During the course, I found you to be incredibly good natured and very willing to help both me and the students. Your positive spirit was immensely valuable to the teaching team. You showed great initiative in all aspects of your work, from planning and preparing for the daily sessions, to leading case discussions, to organizing for the role play, and to grading the assignments. I can say with complete honesty, this course would not have gone as well as it did without your excellent participation. Thank you for all you did in contributing to the overall success of this course!

My assessment of you was echoed by the students in their evaluations of your work. Specifically, using a 5-point scale (where 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) students were asked to indicate their level of agreement with eight questions about your performance as a TA. The average score for each question, as well as an overall average are shown in the table below. On all questions, you received an average score above 4.0. Twelve of your 35 students gave you a perfect score (i.e., they strongly agreed with all of the questions). This is very impressive for a first time TA for this course. Well done!

1. Was well prepared for the sessions?	<b>4.54</b>
2. Understood the materials?	<b>4.62</b>
3. Communicated the materials clearly and effectively?	<b>4.15</b>
4. Was effective at facilitating discussion?	<b>4.35</b>
5. Was effective in answering student questions?	<b>4.37</b>
6. Was responsive to student challenges and concerns?	<b>4.49</b>
7. Helped you come to your own conclusions about the topics?	<b>4.51</b>
8. Reinforced your understanding of the concepts and lessons from readings?	<b>4.23</b>
<b>Overall Average</b>	<b>4.41</b>

In addition to the quantitative evaluation questions, students were asked open-ended questions. Responses to these questions buttress my conclusion that you are a strong TA and on your way to becoming an excellent teacher. In response to the first question, “*What did you liked best about your TA’s teaching style?*”, students wrote that you were “inclusive,” “responsive,” “accessible,” “friendly and open,” “approachable,” and “helpful.” Several other students said you were “a good facilitator and adept at extracting meaningful points from students” and that you “asked thought provoking questions.” They liked your “flexible leadership style that was both firm and adaptable,” that you “created a fun but productive environment,” and that you “infused humor and personal experiences into [your] teachings.” All in all, it is clear from these comments and my observation of your discussion sessions that you are a natural teacher.

The second question asked, “*What changes would you recommend to improve your TA’s teaching style?*” Most of the responses to this question suggest that you work on time management and providing more structure to the facilitated discussions. In terms of the discussions, students suggested that you “take fewer comments,” focus on more “specific points” (as opposed to open-ended ideas), and work on connecting comments to the overall theme of the session. These comments certainly suggest areas on which you can improve, but they are also fairly typical for *anyone* who is trying to facilitate a large group discussion in a new course. All in all, these recommendations do not raise significant concerns for me, especially when balanced with the generally positive reviews you received and my overall observation of your teaching. As you move forward with teaching – I hope you will be a TA for PAD in summer 2013 – I am confident that your management of these minor issues will improve.

In sum, I wanted to take a moment to thank you for your assistance with, and dedication to, PAD. You were an incredible attribute and important key to the success of the course. I simply could not have asked for a better TA, and sincerely hope you will consider this position again next summer. Thank you again, Sean. It was more than a pleasure to work with you!

All the best,



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