



University Honors Programs

June 4, 2014

To Whom It May Concern:

From January to May of 2014, Karra Shimabukuro served as a teaching assistant in a junior-level course in myth archetypes which I taught through the English department at the University of New Mexico. Throughout the semester, she proved to be a valuable colleague; she was organized, hardworking, and especially engaged in helping me to improve the quality of the students' writing.

The course in which Karra worked with me posed a specific set of challenges. The class was quite large—there were 75 students—and few of them were humanities majors, let alone English majors. As a consequence, few of the students were prepared for the level of analytic writing the course required, and it was crucial that we strengthen their skills without sacrificing attention to the course content. From our first meeting, Karra demonstrated that she was committed to doing whatever was required to help improve the students' writing. This included not only investing fully in assigned exercises but also making herself available during office hours to meet with students and discuss their writing. It is often difficult for me to get students to turn to teaching assistants for help; this semester was a significant exception, however, as many of the students in our class were quite comfortable working through their drafts under Karra's guidance. Moreover, the speed with which Karra grades assignments is impressive; it was not unusual for her to return her group of papers within a day or so of receiving them. This speed helped to enhance students' ability to assimilate suggestions for improvement.

Karra was an important presence throughout the semester. She attended class regularly, missing only a few days when she was out of town for conferences. Her visibility made the students more comfortable approaching her for help; that was a great benefit not only to the students, but to me as well, as it allowed me to devote more time to the students with whom I met. Moreover, whenever the other teaching assistant in the course had some difficulty keeping up with the grading, Karra would volunteer to pick up the slack; this was very generous of her and it helped to keep a sometimes horrific load of grading under control. Karra's attitude toward her work in the course also differed from that of many other graduate students who have assisted me in previous semesters. Some teaching assistants have a tendency to regard their work with faculty as a lower priority than the work they do for courses in which they serve as the primary instructors. In contrast, Karra never made such distinctions and repeatedly showed herself to be fully committed to the students in our myth course.

Karra also went beyond my expectations in her willingness to lead class sessions. She led two content-based classes, as well as a third session that was a writing workshop. She had proposed the latter as an extra meeting outside of class, another good indication of her commitment to the course; when a personal issue required me to miss an upcoming class, we rescheduled the writing workshop for that period. I had no qualms about leaving Karra in charge of such a large group of students; she is confident and professional, and the session was very helpful for the students.

I found Karra to be a good colleague. She is mature, efficient, and organized; moreover, she shows initiative and is generous with her time. This was one of the most pleasant and effective collaborations I have enjoyed with a teaching assistant; Karra's professionalism is quite exceptional.

Sincerely,



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