

Quentin Sutton
4443 Colonial Road
Tarboro NC, 27886
(252) 452-7887
quentinsutton@gmail.com

November 11, 2022

Dear Award Committee,

I am very excited to recommend Zvi Biener for UC's Distinguished Teaching Professor Award. No other professor has had a more positive and enduring impact on my efforts in or out of academics.

I first met Zvi over ten years ago when I began my studies in philosophy. Since then I've had the pleasure of studying with Zvi as a student, teaching assistant, and research assistant. Through the years (I left UC in 2015), he has remained a role model and friend. Below I can only hope to portray a portion of his influence.

Very early on I recognized in Zvi just the sort of philosopher, teacher, and colleague I hoped to become. Zvi's instruction and mentoring features an incredibly rare balance of virtues, managing to be both welcoming and rigorous. He demonstrates a calm confidence and a comfortable transparency about the limits of his knowledge. I learned to appreciate the strength of these qualities in developing my own intellectual demeanor. Perhaps the best lesson in teaching, philosophy, or life I received from a teacher comes from Zvi's repeated ability to answer, "I don't know," when appropriate. It does not take very much time to realize that Zvi *does* know incredibly many things, but it is his ability to recognize the limits of that knowledge which truly speaks to his talents. This is no pretense for Zvi. It is a readiness to learn openly with and from others, a process for which he has many skills to share. There is no day where I do not benefit from this lesson. When teaching my own students, there is no moment where I do not.

Observing Zvi's example was crucial to my academic pursuits. Academia was an intimidating world for me to step into. At the time I could think of no family members who had attended college, let alone advanced studies. In fact, where I'm from, education is commonly frowned upon. Furthermore, my previous academic experience was at a small, somewhat sleepy state school. Academic Philosophy's reputation for severe competitiveness challenged my confidence in my studies. Fortunately, I quickly benefitted from Zvi's guidance and example, without which I would have quit. He was able to recognize both my strengths and deficits and provide insightful assistance in improving both. With his help I was able to explore and refine ideas openly without fear of judgment.

Whether I was working through difficult readings, giving seminar presentations, submitting research, or just hashing out ideas of interest, Zvi always gave genuinely insightful, helpful feedback. Mistakes, dead ends, or confusions were never treated as failures but as steps in the process of refining understanding. This is how he treated all of his students. It was liberating.

I cannot stress enough how important this is in a field where students often feel a constant pressure to "sound smart." Instead, Zvi fosters rigor by way of encouraging skilled inquisitiveness. When personal struggles with health threatened my academics, Zvi was remarkably understanding and encouraging where others saw these challenges as a liability. He always emphasized my well being and never echoed the more unhealthy pressures of academic culture.

The results of his influence were substantial. My writing improved, my ideas sharpened, and I developed my own comfortable confidence. I wound up presenting at professional conferences and found my own voice as a teacher. I learned how to share critical assessments in a way which is collaborative and beneficial to others without detracting from them. Zvi helped tremendously in these matters. It is not as though he gave targeted lessons on such things. He simply exemplified virtues in a way others could learn from. All these years later, I still benefit from studying with Zvi. I still ask him for advice about my career or good books to pick up.

It is my strong conviction that we sorely lack for more educators like Zvi. I enthusiastically urge you to select him for the Distinguished Teaching Professor Award.

Sincerely,

Quentin Sutton