



11/13/2022

Dear Awards Committee,

I am writing this letter to support the nomination of Dr. Zvi Biener for UC's Distinguished Teaching Professor Award. I am now an assistant professor of philosophy at the Ohio State University. But I have known Zvi since I started my Ph.D. at the University of Cincinnati in 2015. As an International student, I was struggling with both the spoken language of the country and the unspoken vernacular of academia and academic success. I have relied on Zvi every step of the way from identifying my strengths and weaknesses as a student to finding my voice as a teacher. He was one of the few who taught me that the value of my philosophical contributions was independent of my incompetence in language or academic culture. His feedback on the very first paper I wrote as a PhD student, for example, involved charitable comments and notes about his own experience with academic writing as a non-native speaker. To this day, while giving feedback to my students, I think about his compassionate comments. Without crossing the boundaries of professional norms, they relieved me of my anxieties.

Zvi is a passionate teacher. He is known for his ability to turn complicated and convoluted historical texts into stimulating conversations that last beyond class time. His ability to break down complex and technical concepts into accessible and interesting bites is exceptional. I have learned from Zvi that passion is contagious and necessary for quality education. I have also learned that respect and inclusivity are skills that a good teacher can model for their students. Despite his vast body of knowledge, Zvi also models epistemic humility and mutual learning practices that have changed how I think about learning.

Zvi is also a resourceful and generous mentor. He is often the first, and sometimes the only one, who volunteers to provide help when needed. For example, he did a full mock interview with me before my first job market experience which lifted my confidence and improved my presentation. He is also an all-time favorite for our monthly professional development meetings. I still have detailed notes from five years ago about creating a polished job market and teaching portfolio. I continue to organize my papers in a binder as I learned from him when I was a junior graduate student. I also have learned from Zvi how to be more than my job, to be a good colleague liked by everyone, and a good friend to talk to.

Zvi advocates for students without hesitation. This advocacy is not limited to his direct students or only those who match the traditional academic expectations. I never worried about him perceiving my differences and academic struggles as weaknesses. Instead of gatekeeping, he offered help and personalized feedback when I needed it the most. Asking him to think through difficult situations with me has never been hard. He was one of the few who encouraged me to trust my instinct and not fear being the first who works on a topic. That advice not only has made my career but has enriched my professional and lived experience.

Zvi has been a role model for me and many others in teaching and mentoring students in ways that speak to their needs and strengths. He also respects his students as his future colleagues and dedicates time and energy to their growth. I know of no one who better exemplified the personal and professional qualities that we honor in a teacher. If I can answer any other questions regarding this nomination, please let me know.

Sincerely,

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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
