

To the ***CEAS Spalding Awards for TA Excellence committee***

Thirst I want to thank the committee for this wonderful initiative. Given all the extra challenges that our TAs had to go through last couple of years, this is a well thought initiative and well-deserved by our hard-working TAs. I would like to give my strongest recommendation for Dwight Browne, who was the lead TA for the CSCI 4448 that I taught during Spring'21 semester. The class had a mix of juniors and seniors, and Dwight went above and beyond the call of duty to meet the students where they are and to provide extra support. In my experience with teaching classes for more than a decade at MIT, UIUC, OSU and CU Boulder, I have never seen a more dedicated and more passionate TA than Dwight. I and the students were simply fortunate to have Dwight as a TA.

I will give examples and talk about how Dwight's background added tremendous value in the class. Dwight is not a typical grad student. He has worked in the software industry for more than 2 decades, and has been in some very influential roles, including VP of software development at leading financial institutions such as Goldman-Sachs, Barclays, Lehman Brothers. I knew that I wanted to put an emphasis in my class on students getting very realist software development experience and going through all the major lifecycle of developing professional quality software (including professional design documents, automated testing, high-quality code, documentation, frequent releases, etc.). What I did not know before I started the class was how much I would rely on Dwight to convey the importance of all those software quality artifacts to students. Because of Dwight's experience in the industry, students respected his opinion and took to heart his feedback on how to improve the quality of their code. Many students got amazing jobs recently based on them presenting the project portfolio they developed under Dwight's supervision.

Knowing the wealth of Dwight's experience, I wanted him to interface with the project teams at each milestone (i.e., every two weeks). Dwight went above and beyond in providing high-quality feedback, being very accommodating with students because of the interruptions caused by the pandemic and the mental distress of the mass shooting from March'21. Several students came to me privately and talked very highly about Dwight's helping them and caring about them. Dwight always held a very high standard of professional excellence, but he approached it from an attitude of helping students raise to that high level of professionalism. He was always a caring coach, alongside the student on their journey to professional mastery.

I want to commend Dwight on another remarkable trait. Given that he is an African-American, he experienced some racist comments from a small fraction of the students in the class. He addressed those with the utmost professionalism and business ethics, and he always treated those students better than they treated him. Dwight was an inspiration for me on how to take the high road and always treat people better than they treat us.

In my role as being affiliated with the premier leadership development organization in the world, the John Maxwell Team, I am in a good position to notice leadership qualities and traits. Dwight is a leader and influencer from a rare class of leaders who balance candor with care.

If you have other questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, I would be happy to talk for hours about all the amazing things that Dwight did in my class for the students, and more importantly about the amazing person that Dwight is, his character, dedication and passion to helping others achieve excellence. For this and many other reasons, I give my strongest recommendation for Dwight to receive the award. We are simply fortunate to have Dwight in our community.

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