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To whom it may concern:

I am writing to strongly recommend Sheena Patel. I've had the pleasure of having Sheena in two of my classes, Biochemistry for Life Sciences and Introduction to Molecular Biology Research. I've also had the opportunity to supervise Sheena in our Instructional Internship course. I've known Sheena since Spring 2024 when she took her first class with me, Introduction to Molecular Biology Research. Unsurprisingly, after having gotten to know Sheena, she performed exceptionally well in all three of these courses/internships. There is of course more to this student than simply what grade they earned in these classes. During my time as Sheena's professor they made themselves known to me which is something that is not exactly typical or easy to do in large classes. Out of the 150-200 students generally found in my lecture class (Biochemistry for Life Sciences) I could always count on Sheena to either come early or stay after to ask questions or seek clarification. Moreover, they did so in a way that made it clear to me that they weren't looking for "what will be on the exam"; she was genuinely curious about the topics we were covering which, again, is something that is not always typical. I would routinely observe Sheena trying to help or explain topics to those in their friend group before class (when not asking me questions…). My personal interactions with Sheena have always been refreshingly pleasant. While the "it was a pleasure to have this student in my class" language has become boilerplate, it really was very nice having Sheena as a student both due to their personality and the genuine curiosity about the material. It was also always a pleasant encounter when she would come for office hours to talk about not only the material but to discuss her plans and career prospects.

I've also had the opportunity to observe Sheena's problem solving and analytic skills in my Introduction to Research class. In this class students are responsible for isolating a novel gene from a cDNA library and performing a bioinformatic analysis of the DNA sequence to discover it's function. While we do guide the students through this process Sheena did truly excel here. They understand the underlying science behind the protocols and analytical methods we applied in class in a way that not many students do. During the practical portion of the lab I rarely had to explain a protocol, procedure or topic to her a second time and, to the contrary, often saw them help guide lab partners through that day's experiment.

In Summer of 2025 I had unique opportunity of supervising Sheena in our inaugural semester of the Instructional Internship offered by our department. This internship is offered to

only 4 students per year, and due to her performance and interpersonal skills Sheena was among those offered the internship. The internship works with the Waksman Institute Summer Experience (WISE) program offered during each summer. This program is an intensive two week course offered to high school students mainly in New Jersey but nationally as well. During these two weeks students learn how to perform lab techniques ranging from starting bacterial cultures through PCR and DNA sequencing. Once student samples are sequenced they also learn how to perform bioinformatic analyses of these sequences resulting in publishable data for the participants. Sheena (and the other internship participants') role was to help guide these students through these wet-lab protocols and subsequent analysis. Sheena was able to establish a solid rapport with the program participants, effectively guide them through their experiments and analyses, answer question and was able to lead several protocol demonstrations on her own. This of course is all expected of the interns and Sheena did exemplary work, however her work ethic went beyond what was expected. Two days into the 2-week program, a water pipe above the lab burst and the ceiling collapsed. We had to move quickly to secure a new lab space for the participants and transfer all the equipment to that new space. This was "not in the job description" so to speak. Sheena did not hesitate, started cataloging, packaging, transporting and re-distributing all the equipment in the new lab space. This happened in the span of less than 3 hours but allowed the program participants to pick their experiments back up in the new space with minimal disruption. More than anything, to me, this highlighted her ability to problem solve and think "in a bind" in addition to the regular internship duties which, again, she performed admirably.

In the time that I've been able to have getting to know Sheena, I have absolutely no doubt that She will succeed not only in post-graduate education should that be what she chooses but in anything she will set her mind to. She is passionate about the material, shows genuine curiosity and seems to always be able and willing to help those around. Having observed also her exceptional interpersonal skills and the ability to communicate complex ideas to students coming in to our program with limited science backgrounds I have to absolutely recommend this student. I have had many conversations with Sheena about her plans and have absolutely encouraged to pursue post-secondary degrees (whether that be an MD or PhD she would be more than capable of both). I am *very* excited to see what she will accomplish with it. If you have any other questions or concerns please don't hesitate to reach out by email, I am more than glad to answer any specific questions you have about this remarkable student.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gabe Villegas
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