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I am so humbled to have been given the opportunity to write this letter about my former esteemed professor, Dr. Gurajala. To give a quick introduction about myself and how I know Dr. Gurajala; my name is Eric Alexander Zair. I am currently working as a Lead Software Engineer at Lockheed Martin; focusing on leading a Machine Learning project and supporting other Data Analytic products. As a graduate of SUNY Potsdam's Computer Science department, I have had the pleasure of taking several courses with Dr. Gurajala and working under her as a teaching assistant.

I recall the first elective I had taken to start off my Computer Science career: Introduction to Database Systems. Interestingly enough, this was Dr. Gurajala's first elective taught at SUNY Potsdam, and I will say without a doubt she did an amazing job. Taking this course really opened my mind to databases and data science, amongst other things. I recall a particular moment in class where Dr. Gurajala had demoed some fascinating code that she had been working on involving Twitter data and air quality. She began explaining how she was able to collect data from Twitter using a tool called "Tweepy". Later on that day, I ended up going home and building a fun little application using that tool. That one class session really opened my eyes to all the amazing things you could do with data collection, which eventually led me to my current position.

Without hesitation, I can say that I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to study Cryptography, Machine Learning, and Networking. Dr. Gurajala always taught the most fascinating courses. Moreover, she had a way of taking these incredibly difficult and theoretical topics, and displaying examples of how they are used in the real world. She has a natural talent of showing how to apply the theory in a significant and practical way. In every single elective that I have taken with Dr. Gurajala, there was always a research presentation that we had to do as well as a final project, which I found to be extremely. She provides us the chance to test our skills and interests in an awesome custom project of our own choice. This teaching method is admirable! Not only does the student get to work on something they are interested in, but it really forces them to play around with new and interesting tools, which makes it challenging and allows students to focus on their strengths and recognize their weaknesses!

Dr. Gurajala is an excellent professor being that she was also extremely helpful with SUNY Potsdam and student activities. She has been involved in numerous ACM club events,

such as the New York Celebration of Women in Computing (NYCWIC) conference, where she drove a bunch of students up in rental vans from the college and took us to multiple conference talks, lunches, dinners, and even a haunted ghost ship tour! Additionally, she was an active faculty advisor for the ACM-W chapter at SUNY Potsdam. When we entered the NYCWIC poster competition, Dr. Gurajala wholeheartedly supported us; she was our cheerleader. She helped us collect data, analyze it, find interesting correlations, and design the overall look and visualization of our poster with the collected data. It was no surprise that we were able to win the “Best Poster Competition” at the conference that year. She has given multiple talks, presentations, and speeches at SUNY Potsdam, discussing topics such as Data Visualization, her research on air pollution, Data Analytics, and many other topics.

In closing, if there is one thing I can say about Dr. Gurajala, it's that she really cares about her students. She wants to see them learn, develop their skills, attend conferences, work on personal projects, and enjoy life at SUNY Potsdam! If you are having a bad day you can always talk to her about it because she genuinely cares about her students. She made learning theoretical Computer Science fun yet informative and I, for one, can really respect that and look up to that. Professors like her are not easy to come by and I genuinely believe that. If I had the opportunity I would still be taking classes with her!

Best regards,

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