

November 30, 2012

I have been asked by Stacey Livingstone to write a letter of recommendation in support of her application for admission to the University of California, Berkeley, College of Letters and Science, Sociology Department Ph.D. program; I am delighted to do so. I have known Stacey since she joined the program a year and half ago. She was my graduate assistant her first semester and this semester she is taking a graduate course that I am co-teaching, Globalization and Ethics. I have been her mentor throughout her time in the program and am familiar with all of her work.

I have been teaching at San Diego State for sixteen years and I teach lower division general education courses, upper division courses, and graduate seminars. I also have been on the thesis committees and comprehensive exam committees of more than thirty students, five of whom are currently fully funded in Ph.D. programs at elite universities. I mention this primarily as way of indicating the group with which I will be comparing Stacey.

Two ways that I usually compare students is how they rank in relation to their cohort and/or previous cohorts and then how they rank generally in intelligence compared to other students within the group. First, Stacey is the best student in her cohort by far, and the best graduate student in the last eight years. Eight years is the time I have had most of my contact with graduate students and therefore the time frame that I can use as a reference for comparison. Second, I would say that she is in the top 1% intellectually of all the students that I have worked with at San Diego State. This would include not just graduate students but undergraduate students and be over five thousand.

I rank Stacey this high for three reasons. First, Stacey has the broadest knowledge base of any of the graduate students with which I have worked. Those of us familiar with her application to the program thought at the time that she applied to our program she should have applied to a Ph.D. program. However, her family circumstances made that impossible. She has continued to improve her knowledge base and other academic skills during her time in the program. In our course on globalization, she has not only read everything

assigned, but has gone beyond the assignments. She comes to office hours each week to discuss the issues that have been raised in class and questions she has from her independent reading. She also began an informal group of students from the class that meets every Friday. Second, of the graduate students that I have worked with in courses, theses, and comp exams, she has the most advanced capacity to reason complexly and think critically. Her presentation in the graduate seminar reflected this (as well as her knowledge base). She used Edward Said's concept of cultural imperialism to argue that images (particularly images of race) in Western media are powerful tools in the service of neoliberal globalization. It was well developed, well argued, and well presented. Third, Stacey is an excellent and diligent researcher with comprehensive research skills. Her research on the subtle and not so subtle images of race in media in her report is an example. Her ability to do excellent qualitative research is exemplified in her paper "Counter Hegemonic Femininity in a Hegemonic All Boys Club" which was the result of interviews with women in the military. Her writing sample, "Continuity and Change in the Composition and Bogeymen of the U.S. Military," which as her mentor I am familiar with, is an excellent example of her broad knowledge base, her complex reasoning and critical thinking skills.

As I mentioned, during her first semester, Stacey was my graduate assistant and was the best assistant that I have had in my sixteen years of teaching. I was so impressed that I recommended her to be considered for the position of Teaching Assistant for the department's large introduction class. Because teaching assistants teach break out sections, usually to be considered for that position, students have to be in their second year of the graduate program. She was accepted and has been very successful as a teaching assistant and the last two semesters she had the position of Lead Teaching Assistant.

I would like to make a comment about Stacey as a person that I believe is not separate from but tied to her academic interests. Because I have worked with her closely since she has been in the program, I have come to know her as a compassionate person who cares about people, and because of that she is a person who cares about social justice. And I believe that the globalization course and the readings in it have given her a focus of study, and a passion and a commitment to that study.

I give Stacey my highest recommendation without qualification. I am confident she will excel in the program, will complete the program and be a

wonderful representative of the program. If I can be of further assistance, I can be reached at psemm@mail.sdsu.edu or 619-594-5906.

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