January 15, 2012

To: Admissions Committee

Master in Social Work Program

University of Southern California

I have been asked by Debora Ribas-Santos to write a letter of recommendation in support of her application to the Master of Social Work program at the University of Southern California. I usually do not write letters of recommendation for students whose academic performance in my courses has not been outstanding. In Debora’s case, I am making an exception. I have known Debora for more than four years; she was a student of mine in an upper division course called Wealth, Status and Power in the Sociology Department at San Diego State University and a lower division course called Introduction to Social Problems. Debora received a C+ in the former and a B- in the latter. The evaluation process for the upper division course was rigorous, but not excessively so; the class average was a C. There were two papers and three exams, so I believe a grade in the course, good or bad, would tend in most cases to provide an insight into a student’s potential to do graduate work. I do not believe this is true in Debora’s case. I don’t think the grade reflected her academic potential or her lack of concern in regard to the issues raised in class, or her lack of effort. Debora participated regularly in class discussion, and her participation reflected an engagement with and understanding of the material. She also took advantage of office hours to discuss issues raised in class. Academically, I would rank Debora in the top 15% of students that I have taught at SDSU.

I believe Debora’s academic performance was impacted by her participation in and leadership of a student movement. Perhaps this is a more important consideration for a social work program. Debora came to be the central figure in a movement that challenged the budget cuts and its negative consequences on education, especially for minorities. Debora worked well with everyone and got along with everyone. She committed many hours of her time to organizing and bringing diverse groups like MECHA, the campus Socialists and the “radical” art department together in the largest student protest at SDSU since 1992.

I recommend Debora and hope that other letters of recommendation, her personal statement and her Graduate Record Exam will justify my belief that she will be successful in the School’s Social Work Program and also be a successful professional. If I can be of any further assistance, I can be reached at [psemm@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:psemm@mail.sdsu.edu).

Sincerely,

P. Tom Semm

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