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April 30, 2023

Committee on GSA Excellence in Teaching Award
University of California, Santa Barbara
Santa Barbara, CA 93106-6052

To the members of the Committee on GSA Excellence in Teaching Award:

I am writing in the most enthusiastic terms possible in support of Elliott Finn's nomination for the 2022 GSA Excellence in Teaching Award. I have worked with Elliott three times for the Environmental Studies Program--most recently last year when he volunteered to serve as a mentor to one of the ES honors senior thesis students, Taylor Roe. In addition, Elliott was one of more experienced TAs in a teaching team for two larger lower division introductory courses, ENV S 1 and ENV S 3, that I taught. I have also observed Elliott in teaching team meetings, read his section emails and other class materials, and heard student feedback about his teaching contributions.

Of all of the TAs I have had the good fortune to work alongside, no one has matched Elliott's commitment to serve UCSB's undergraduate students with such clarity and enthusiasm in a range of settings from one of UCSB's largest classes to mentoring a single thesis writer. For example, I was the instructor of record for the ES senior thesis seminar last year and saw over twenty examples of faculty mentorship over a 9-month period. As the undergraduate student's only advisor, Elliott guided his student from initial project conception to the award-winning final product and presentation. And it was Elliott's first-time advising an undergraduate thesis writer--spending hours and hours to read, comment, and support this young person! No superlatives could begin to capture the difference that Elliott has consistently made in the lives of his many students. As a direct result of Elliott's support and guidance, his undergraduate mentee won one of the 2021-22 campus-wide UCSB Library Awards for Undergraduate Research (LAUR).

There are literally dozens of other examples I could share to demonstrate Elliott's excellence as a teacher. I am struck by his ability to bring together passion, structure, and clarity to his students but also his colleagues in the larger lower division introductory courses like ENV S 1 and ENV S 3. I could mention his patient guidance to help newer TAs develop appropriate lesson plans and use GauchoSpace into the early hours, or filling in at a moment's notice to teach section when another TA became ill, or his thoughtful, constructive feedback to students individually and as a group over email messages, Zoom meetings, or prerecorded videos week in and week out. Or I could highlight his brilliant comments to help his students understand the challenges and rewards of collaborate research about indigenous and rural contributions to western public lands policy in environmental studies. It is clear to me that Elliott loves teaching UCSB's undergraduates and the students respond in kind: they are able to thrive in the atmosphere of rigor and enthusiasm he fosters.

In conclusion, I cannot think of any other graduate student who more clearly embodies the achievements and values that this award represents. I hope you will consider Elliott's nomination. He is a truly exceptional teacher and leader in our university's learning community. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Jen Martin'.

Jen Martin