



BREN SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE & MANAGEMENT
SARAH ANDERSON, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

SANTA BARBARA, CA 93106
<http://www.bren.ucsb.edu/>

April 26, 2023

Dear Selection Committee:

I am delighted to write this recommendation for Elliott Finn for the GSA Excellence in Teaching Award. Elliott entered the Bren School PhD program in the Fall of 2017 and has served as a Teaching Assistant for my course Environmental Politics and Policy for the last four years, so I have had the opportunity to observe his teaching strengths closely. Elliott's teaching strengths are in his rapport with the students, his willingness to go above and beyond to offer them guidance and assistance, and his deep engagement with the material in ways that motivate the students to learn.

The course Elliott has TA's with me has approximately 80 professional Master's students in it each year. He is responsible for attending lectures, teaching sections independently, and grading. In prior years, he has also helped with course and assignment development. (We would have solicited his help again this year, but it coincided with the TA strike.) As you know, Elliott has also served as Instructor of Record for his own courses and taken the opportunity to TA in many other courses in order to develop his teaching skills.

Elliott works hard to develop excellent rapport with the students. He begins with a questionnaire for the students that elicits their policy interests and information about their learning style and needs. The students clearly appreciate this attention to their individual needs. And it allows Elliott to develop familiarity with their interests in order to be able to connect the course material to those specific interests. He can always convey to me how to support a student, whether there are particular issues arising, and suggestions for how to make the students more successful. For example, he elicited pronouns from students before Gauchospace could provide them. I know from talking to Elliott that this openness and effort to create a supportive environment means that he goes frequently helps students to navigate mental health challenges and personal situations that affect their education.

Elliott's second strength is his commitment to providing students with innovative resources to enhance their learning. For example, he developed a guidance document for the policy brief assignment that built on the guidance provided in the syllabus. It explained the audience, how to communicate, and what the content should be. The students deeply appreciated his attention to detail and the assistance that guidance document provides. Over the past few years, he has provided grading rubrics for all of the assignments so that students are clear on the expectations, offered forums for students to receive peer feedback, and held countless office hours to make sure that students have every opportunity to achieve the learning outcomes of the course.

Finally, Elliott is great at engaging the students in the material for the course. He regularly brings current events examples into the lectures and his sections. He knows that providing content that

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connects with the students' interests will motivate them to learn the conceptual material. And he develops his own section materials that offer students opportunities to engage the materials in ways that expand on the lecture material and assignments. Frankly, he is functionally another teacher in the class because his teaching experience and skills allow him to go beyond the role of teaching assistant – even for these Masters level students.

In short, I strongly support his nomination for the GSA Excellence in Teaching Award. Elliott is seeking a teaching-oriented position – a direction I fully support having observed his commitment to and skill in teaching. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SA', written in a cursive style.

Sarah Anderson