



April 2023

Dear GSA Excellence in Teaching Award Selection Committee,

It is a privilege and an honor to strongly recommend Elliott Finn be a recipient of the 2023 GSA Excellence in Teaching Award. Elliott was my TA for ESM 210, Business and the Environment and ESM 241, Environmental Politics and Policy, both graduate level courses offered through the Bren School of Environmental Science and Management. Through attending office hours and speaking with Elliott during sections and lectures, I got to know Elliott very well as a teacher and mentor. As such, I believe I can wholeheartedly say that Elliott is an exceptionally worthy recipient of this award as he consistently goes above and beyond in his role as a teacher and a mentor to help students succeed.

Elliott's dedication to being an outstanding instructor is evident in his teaching style. He consistently developed section activities that were not only extremely engaging but also presented the course material in a way that promoted active learning and thoughtful discussion amongst students. It was clear that he had both an enthusiasm for teaching and expertise of the course material. In addition, Elliott provided outstanding feedback on all our assignments and was consistently available to help us fully develop our course deliverables. Because of Elliott's excellent guidance on assignments, I felt encouraged not just to answer the questions we were given, but to think deeply about the course material and fully flush out my course deliverables. His enthusiasm for the material and support to help us work through the course really encouraged development of critical thinking skills that I believe helped me and all of his other students develop tremendously as scholars and future environmental professionals.

Some of the most exceptional qualities of Elliott as a teacher and mentor are his active engagement in normalizing conversations around mental health and his work to create a safe learning environment for all students. I have personally experienced this. During one office hours during the Winter, I mentioned to Elliott that I was in the process of getting an ADHD diagnosis. Elliott not only shared his own personal experiences of being neurodivergent in academia with me, but also provided me with resources to help me through the diagnosis process. It was so incredibly heartwarming to have a space where I felt like I could openly discuss neurodivergence and get genuine empathy and support around it. It is so important to have teachers like Elliott who provide spaces to have open conversations about mental health. Elliott's fostering of a safe learning space extended beyond office hours into a more formal classroom setting as well. During sections, Elliott made sure that students always felt comfortable in the classroom. He took the time to get to know everyone's names and I could tell that he put a lot of effort into seeing us as humans, not just as our grades or our assignments. On the first day of class Elliott had us introduce ourselves and share a bit about our interests. I was impressed that he made a genuine effort to remember these details about us and tried to integrate and connect these interests to our coursework. It made the class both incredibly engaging and was also a huge part of making students feel comfortable in class.



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Beyond this, Elliott went above and beyond in making the course material accessible. I recall having a particularly difficult time with some of the course material in ESM 210 (Business and the Environment) and going to office hours multiple times to try and get help understanding the material. Elliott always took the time to thoughtfully answer all of my questions. I really appreciated how he found unique and creative ways to explain course concepts when students like myself didn't understand the way our professor had explained it in class. His creativity in helping really demonstrated to me how much Elliott cared about his students and how adaptive and flexible he is as a teacher.

Overall, Elliott is an extremely worthy and deserving recipient of this award. His work to create and promote safe learning spaces, develop engaging and accessible course material, and his genuine care for his students makes him an extraordinary teacher. I have witnessed him consistently go above and beyond and I have no doubt that he will continue to have a positive impact on students into the future. Please feel free to contact me at srozal@bren.ucsb.edu if you have any further questions, and I truly hope you select Elliott for this award.

Best,
Samantha (Sam) Rozal
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