



DEPARTMENT OF ECOLOGY, EVOLUTION AND MARINE BIOLOGY

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6/16/21

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To whom it may concern:

Please accept this letter of recommendation for SARA STERPHONE for the 2021 Margaret T. Getman Award. In twenty four years of teaching in the UC system, ten at UC Berkeley and fourteen at UCSB, I have occasionally nominated students, staff and faculty colleagues for awards or distinctions. In no case has the award been more deserved than in this case. This is not a statement I make lightly. In fact I just searched my folder of letters of recommendation and I have used a similar phrase once before – in 2017 when Sara was nominated for the Staff Citation of Excellence Award.

I have known Sara since she was first employed at UCSB in 2013 as a Student Affairs Officer in the College of Creative Studies (CCS), despite not having previous experience in advising students; in fact I was on the search committee that appointed her. After barely a year in her first advising position the Senior Student Affairs Officer position in the College became available. Although we have had a tradition in CCS of taking young and often relatively inexperienced candidates for the more junior position, the senior position requires a lot more experience with student advising, with the College and with University procedures and practice. Although we conducted an open search and had a good applicant pool of experienced advisors, we again chose Sara for this position because not only had she learned so much, so quickly, and integrated herself deeply into the College in a single year but, quite frankly, she blew everyone away at the interview with her in depth understanding of the College and especially student issues. Coming from a background of no student advising she had soaked up so much in one year that she was not only qualified for the position, she was simply the best candidate we could have hoped for.

In the seven years she spent in the College Sara touched the lives of many students in ways that went way above and beyond the expectations of her advising role. Sara's dedication to the students is extraordinary. She is not only always well prepared and organized but she takes the time to listen to students. Really listen, and to hear both what they are saying and to intuit what they are not saying. She is prepared to be tough with students when necessary and is never afraid to dig deeper to find the source of problems. She always has time for students and she is a reliable and smiling presence at all college events whether during the day, the evening or the weekend.

I asked some colleagues about what made Sara so special and I think one of them nailed it when she said that Sara makes everyone she comes into contact with feel like they are the center of her attention with every interaction. No matter how busy she is, she slows down to make the

time to listen to students' needs even when it means she has to work extra hours to attend to her administrative projects. Several students have independently told me how surprised they were when, after studying in the CCS building late into the evening, they found the light on in Sara's office and how she would always, no matter the time, be happy to chat with them.

During her time at CCS, she caringly greeted every student who crossed her path with familiarity, an incredible sense of humor, and an infectious laugh. She made an extra effort to engage shy or vulnerable students. These may seem like they are small things in-and-of themselves, but each interaction built a bond between the student and the college. These are the moments that can make the difference in the life of a student, and taken together they foster community and create safe spaces. I honestly believe that you could pick any student in the college, any of them, and they would not only give you a glowing endorsement of Sara but they would probably each also have an individual story of how she had gone out of her way to help or advise them in some unique way.

I personally interacted extensively with Sara in a number of my roles on campus – as an advisor and program coordinator within the Biology program in CCS, as Chair of the Faculty Executive Committee within CCS and also as an Associate Dean in the Division of Undergraduate Education in Letters and Science. All of these roles allow me to experience different aspects of Sara's role but also to see many other staff members on campus. For example in my role as Associate Dean I interact with the staff of around two dozen advisors in the Division of Undergraduate Education in Letters and Science, and many more in individual departments. I have been very impressed by the dedication of these staff members and their commitment to students. But none of the advisors I have met on campus match Sara's ability to simultaneously be friend, counsellor and advisor to students.

I feel extraordinarily lucky to work at a campus such as UCSB that has been able to attract extremely talented faculty, staff and students. But even in such a pool there are some individuals who stand out due to either their talent or their dedication. It is rare though to find an individual who has both the talent and the dedication of Sara Sterphone. She has had a tremendous impact on the students in CCS and is thoroughly deserving of this award.



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