

October 9, 2020

To Whom It May Concern,

It is with great honor that I recommend Ryan Furlong as an English instructor committed to championing diversity and supporting students of color in-and-out of the classroom. I was a student in Mr. Furlong's Interpretation of Literature course at the University of Iowa during the Fall semester of 2019. As such, I can attest from the lens of a female African-American student, he was both a powerful instructor and an amazing role model whom passionately sought to meet the learning needs and betterment of non-white students, specifically. I experienced this first-hand.

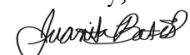
On the very first day of class, I walked in and immediately felt very awkward, being that I was the only African-American student in the class. I didn't know what to expect, however, I only wished for the best in my new educational journey attending a university with a majority-white student population. The very moment Mr. Furlong began class with such a warm welcome and kind smile, the feeling of awkwardness swiftly eased. Mr. Furlong's class became a place that I always looked forward to attending. I made it my goal not to miss one class not just because I wanted to earn an A but more because my overall learning experience in his class was so successful and supportive.

Mr. Furlong had a unique ability to bring such amazing strengths to the learning process. He continuously displayed great knowledge of African-American literature and culture, as well as his passion for equality and justice, for all, in his curriculum and lesson plans. It was never his intention to force his beliefs on us but rather to inspire us to be knowledgeable and aware of how to pursue truth in our own attempts analyzing literary texts and applying it to our world, personally and politically. It certainly became a safe place for me as an African American female whom constantly had to face inequality and discrimination. I was inspired by what we learned in class pertaining to African American and non-white literatures. Within his mini-lessons and class activities, he would often offer powerful sayings and unique perspectives from various African American writers and leaders, and other non-white authors, such as Frederick Douglass, Malcolm X, former President Barack Obama, and many more. His creative teaching methods were tailored for our assigned readings but also were relatable to me personally. He showed his great concern for teaching the African-American literary tradition with immense insight and applicability to my own life.

Mr. Furlong has always supported, inspired, and encouraged me, consistently taking time in-class and outside of it to expand my knowledge and cultivate abilities effective, compelling writing and critical close reading. My experiences from my other classes and instructors did not even come close to his strong mentorship. I had to stay behind several times after class, along with other students, to gain more clarity on a question or suggestions on how to hone my writing skills. Time never seemed like it was a concern or issue to him because his primary goal was to ensure I was well supported. Mr. Furlong also knew I was an uncertified preschool teacher striving to become a teacher and he offered me many resources to assist me in my educational endeavors and informed me on available scholarships I would be an excellent candidate for. Additionally, Mr. Furlong worked hard as an advocate for childhood literacy, against food insecurities, and to promote housing stability in Iowa City's African immigrant and African-American communities.

For these reasons, I highly recommend Mr. Furlong, as his deep knowledge and passions for the growth, equality, and betterment of African-Americans and non-white students is simply undeniable.

Sincerely,



Juanita Bates

Undergraduate Student, The University of Iowa