

September 27, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I had Mr. Furlong for my Interpretation of literature class in the Spring of 2020. Usually, when students hear about this general education class, a lot of them dread it and only expect lots of pointless reading, and from my perspective, dead white men. Mr. Furlong opened my eyes in terms of how we can not only see the power and importance of nonwhite authors, but also how to apply them to everyday life and engage the world around me. When I first walked into his classroom, I could feel his positive and enthusiastic energy and he welcomed students, like myself, with the care to learn our names, our histories, and ourselves through “diversity autobiographies.” Typically, English classes almost always had no connection my lived experience as a Latinx student. Professor Furlong, however, went above and beyond my expectations by encouraging us to see ourselves in the text. I always appreciated how our discussions integrated my racial and ethnic backgrounds, giving me the permission to contribute my own experiences and insights on, for example, the enslaved, Cuban writer Juan Manzano and his play *Zafir*. Mr. Furlong, above all, made me feel welcome, supported, and safe.

Mr. Furlong’s greatest strength, however, was how he addressed my special accommodations in regards to my identity. I am a student that has learning disabilities, auditory-processing being one. For this, one of my accommodations was that I needed to receive written class notes and audio file recordings so I was able to process information, on my own time, at my own pace. Mr. Furlong not only met this, he exceeded it by providing me daily recordings of his mini-lessons, in-depth, thoughtful write-ups of class notes and discussion points from my peers, and even detailed commentary on each of my rough drafts for our written assignments. From the first week of class, while we were still in person, to the final weeks online, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Furlong was always in constant communication with me to ensure my academic and personal needs were always being met, dedicating multiple hours each week in office hours and after class, to help improve my writing, improve my analytic skills, and even take the time to work through some personal crises I had during the semester. I have never had a professor go to this length to make sure that I had the right resources for success.

Another way in which Mr. Furlong helped meet my special accommodations was through offering extended deadline accommodations and specially-tailored assignments. When we had our first essay due, I struggled to write a thesis statement and organize my thoughts in fear that I might not have enough time. It, cognitively speaking, takes me much longer to latch onto and unpack the ideas I wish to express. Ryan made sure I had as much time as I needed. He assured me that he was more interested in receiving quality (not quick) work. This allowed me to focus more on the content of the paper in chunks, as opposed to being stressed about a particular deadline. More than that, he tailored my exploratory essay so that I could explore different Latinx writers, not just diasporic slave and African-American writers—which the course was oriented around—all while shortening the essay, by a page, to hone my focus and scope in order to cut down on rambling, which I do from time to time.

Along the way Mr. Furlong would never hesitate to read my drafts and give extensive, thoughtful feedback to assure me that I was on the right track. This didn’t change even when the pandemic hit. He had a true desire to be there for each and every student, to meet their needs, and to establish a one-on-one relationship with them. I recommend Mr. Furlong without any reservations. He truly is an amazing, caring professor, teacher, and mentor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carson Beck". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Carson" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Beck".

Carson Beck

Undergraduate Student, The University of Iowa