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Dear Sirs and Madams:

I am writing to enthusiastically recommend D. Magdalena Sorger for a teaching position. I was one of Ms. Sorger's mentors for the prestigious Preparing the Professoriate (PTP) program here at North Carolina State University, which gives me a unique opportunity to recommend Ms. Sorger. Through the interactions as her mentor I find that Ms. Sorger possesses a passion for teaching at the college level that I've rarely seen in someone at this stage in their academic career. She has a unique ability for distilling complex concepts in an extremely effective way within the classroom. I have learned more about teaching from these interactions with Ms. Sorger as part of the PTP than any previous experiences, a case of the "mentee" mentoring the "mentor!" Through my year-long interactions with Ms. Sorger as part of the PTP program, I gained insight into her considerable strengths as a teacher that make her an excellent candidate for a teaching position at the college level, which I will highlight in this letter.

I began interacting with Ms. Sorger early in the spring semester of 2013. I was impressed with her professionalism as she prepared her application for the PTP program, and her thoughtful consideration about her teaching philosophy and what makes an effective teacher were enlightening. Based on this excellent application, she was selected to join the competitive PTP program. During the first semester of the PTP (fall 2013) she observed my field ecology course. We regularly discussed teaching strategies and how to better get students involved in an inquiry-based field course. She gave a guest lecture on scientific writing, where she demonstrated her ability to create an active learning environment. She began the lecture by first demonstrating the parts of a paper using peer-reviewed, scientific journal articles. During this first part of the lecture she discussed the construction of paper titles, topic sentences, parts of paragraphs, and overall flow of a paper using journal articles to demonstrate these important points. In the second half of the lecture she had a group-based activity, where students read an abstract and used this to construct topic sentences for each paragraph of the introduction and discussion. The students shared their topic sentences as she went around the room. What followed was a group discussion on how many paragraphs were necessary, what each paragraph should address and how well the topic sentence set the stage for each paragraph. The students learned more from this hands-on activity than they would have with a simple lecture, and I noted that their subsequent writing assignments substantially improved. The careful crafting of the lecture, to include information exchanges with active participation and a hands-on activity, stood out as an effective approach to the deeper understanding of the scientific writing process.

In the spring of 2014, Ms. Sorger designed and taught her own course titled "Islands and Evolution." This course handled evolution and evolutionary ecology in an applied context with a focus on exploring these concepts on islands. This included "islands" of any size or location, including but not restricted to tropical islands, cities, trees, sky-islands, and human bodies. I worked closely with Ms. Sorger in the fall of 2013 as she designed this course, and was impressed with not only her attention to detail, but her thoughtful construction of the class time with the goal of student engagement. Her overall design of the course included a lecture that allowed for student participation and was broken up by video and current research examples that highlighted the important concepts, and then a hands-on activity related to the lecture topic and involved active research here at NCSU or in the broader research triangle area. This included two activities that I observed where the students participated in collecting phenotypic data from fish in pools with predators versus without predators and exploring the natural history of scales on urban trees in Raleigh, NC. She ended each class with "minute-papers," where the students talked about what they had learned, asked clarification questions, and asked questions that follow-up or extended what they had learned. She revisited these questions at the beginning of the next lecture, providing clarification and extension of the main concepts from the previous lecture and connecting that with the lecture of the day. In effect, these students were encouraged to "own" their understanding of important concepts of evolution and evolutionary ecology. She achieved the greater depth of understanding by exposing them repeatedly to these concepts in a variety of ways. At the end of the course the students put together a video project that highlighted a particular concept in subjects covered in the course and incorporated current research in the subject matter. This served as a way to bring together all the parts of the course in a creative group project, again helping the students own their learning process.

I was impressed with her meticulous organization of the class period, her constant checking in with the students, and the level of content she achieved in a lower-division course. From the fall and into her own course in the spring, I also noted improvements in her teaching. As her confidence grew and her teaching style was notably appreciated by the students, she took more time to engage with the students, spent more time clarifying particularly important points using multiple examples from current research, and took a "less is more" approach to course content. Spending more time deeply with a subject area seemed to improve the experience of both Ms. Sorger and the students in what was already a thoroughly engaging course. She built in assessments and feedback throughout the course to help her modify her approach, which also helped shape the changes I observed during her teaching semester. I surveyed several of the students in the class and they said it was one of the best courses they had taken at NCSU, which to a critical audience and particularly students who knew this was her first time teaching her own course, was promising testament to Ms. Sorger's abilities. They commented that the examples helped highlight the concepts. In addition, they really enjoyed the participation in the group activities.

My overall observations of Ms. Sorger is that she is someone who throws herself completely into designing a course and is able to maintain this throughout the semester. Students benefit from her teaching style, as not only do they learn more about these difficult concepts, but they also enjoy the process and have a sense of ownership of the information. As I think back the first time I taught my own course, and how it was a lesson in survival, Ms. Sorger actually made it through the semester and demonstrated that she not only survived but achieved a level of student engagement most instructors only hope to achieve after several years of teaching. As instructors we strive to create a class that is engaging, while still full of content, and that incorporates active learning, and I believe Ms. Sorger has set a new bar for what that course might look like. I can say my experience working with Ms. Sorger in the PTP program was an education in effective teaching methods for me! For these reasons and the important attributes of her teaching style and philosophy, I can highly and enthusiastically recommend Ms. Sorger for your teaching program. Please let me know if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martha Reiskind". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dr. Martha Burford Reiskind