

February 8, 2017

To the Graduate Student Awards Committee:

I am pleased to support Mr. Rajat Maji as a nominee for a distinguished graduate student award for excellence in teaching. I first met Rajat during the new graduate student orientation in August of 2012 when I was the technical coordinator for the general chemistry lab program (I am now coordinator for the organic teaching labs). Rajat was friendly, asked questions, and answered questions. It was obvious he took the orientation seriously, and I hoped that the level of interest he conveyed that day would translate to a strong job performance as a TA. Fortunately for me, it did.

Rajat taught in first year program in the Fall semester of 2012 before moving to the organic lab program where he has taught an additional six semesters. Rajat is always punctual and well prepared for class, and has met every grading deadline. He also ensures that his students perform the labs correctly and safety. But, Rajat's abilities and performance as a TA extend far beyond this. Rajat has a natural talent for teaching; he is articulate, personable, and great at thinking on his feet. He also has an easy-going personality and a tremendous amount of patience, both of which are essential when working with first semester college freshmen and aspiring pre-med students in organic labs. Rajat is professional and responsible as TA, he *wants* to be an effective teacher and he *wants* to help his students learn.


I observe all of the TAs during their labs, and I am always impressed by Rajat's ability to engage his students in class. During his instruction, Rajat not only asks his students questions but gets them to respond. He is able to improvise examples to illustrate concepts when he senses his students are not grasping the material he is presenting. Rajat's ability to give instruction, both to the class as a whole and one-on-one, has always been top-tier. Even as a first semester TA Rajat's knowledge of chemistry combined with his desire to share a subject he enjoys with students made him an exceptional TA.

Every semester, Rajat's course evaluations show overwhelming positive responses on all aspects of his preparedness, enthusiasm in class, ability to motivate students and creating a positive learning environment. Such positive evaluations for a teaching assistant who doesn't have disproportionately high grades are rare, but Rajat was praised by his students while also holding them to high academic standards. Student comments from Rajat's most recent student evaluations praised Rajat's willingness to help, ability make the lab enjoyable, and motivating students to do well in lab. They also demonstrate his dedication to helping students learn: "Mr. Maji was always helping us understand the information. He never gave the answer to us, but always made us think through it to come to the right conclusion. I honestly think that he helped me understand more this semester than I have in my previous two semesters combined."

Rajat has been recognized several times for outstanding teaching. He received an award from the Chemistry department for excellence in teaching in the organic program in 2015. He was also one of 12 teaching assistants university-wide who were recognized for excellence in peer education in the fall semester of 2013. Rajat is also working toward completion of a certificate from the Academy for Future Faculty and has mentored several REU students and visiting scholars.

I have worked with several small armies of teaching assistants in the first year program and the organic lab program for over five years, and Rajat is the type of TA that everyone, program coordinators, students, and staff *want* to have in their program. He takes his responsibilities seriously and does an outstanding job in every possible way. I believe his application for this award merits full consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Amber Schaefer".

Amber Schaefer
Lecturer and Coordinator for Organic Teaching Labs
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