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It is a pleasure to write this letter of evaluation for Ph.D. Candidate Emma Rifai. Emma is a doctoral student in Religious Studies and is completing her Graduate Certificate in Teaching in order to augment and enhance her Ph.D. in Religious Studies. I have worked with Emma as her Ph.D. co-advisor since her arrival in our Ph.D. program in the Spring of 2015 and it has been an absolute delight working with her. Emma is a consummate professional in all that she does. She has impressed each and every one of the professors in our department. She is exceedingly bright, organized, and devoted to the craft of teaching.

Emma has been my Teaching Assistant for two separate courses: “Sport and Religion in America” and “Religion in America Today.” Both courses are introductory courses and are geared toward first-and second-year students. Emma did an excellent job TA’ing for both of these classes, so much so that students in her discussion sections sought her out to be their TA in other Religious Studies courses for which they enrolled. Indeed, several students who enrolled in the course “Modern Religion” did so because they wanted another opportunity to work with Emma.

Emma has been the best TA I have worked with in my five years at the university. She is self-motivated and has excellent ideas. She devised all of the quizzes for both courses and designed the grading rubrics as well. She designed the weekly discussion sections to enhance what I covered in the lecture section, and she emphasized skill-building in the sections. Specifically, Emma made space for draft writing, peer-review, and workshopping of papers. She did an excellent job helping her students see writing as a process and not a one-time deal. She gave frequent and detailed feedback to the students on their writing and met with students regularly in her office hours.

Emma has also demonstrated top-notch time management skills. She scheduled in time to grade and to give feedback on students’ papers and she always handed back papers and quizzes within a week, usually less. Emma understands that students need frequent and timely feedback in order to improve and she did everything she could to ensure students’ success in her sections. And if and when a student was not able to make it to her office hours, she would make alternative arrangements to ensure their success. I have been deeply impressed with her commitment to her students.

Emma also had an opportunity to provide some lectures in the lecture portion of the two classes. For example, she did a very good job introducing the students in “Sport and Religion” to issues of embodiment, gender, and the “religion of thinness.” Her presentation was a good blend of information and content, visuals (You Tube clips), and discussion. She has a very good classroom presence and is encouraging in her tone. She takes her time and is patient with her students as well; she gives them time to process and to think. The students responded very favorably to her lecture and wanted to know more----which is always an excellent sign.

Emma had the opportunity to introduce “Religion in America” the Fall semester 2015 when I was on my way home from a conference in China. This was my first time not being with my students

the first week of classes in what was then fifteen years of teaching at the college-university level and I was a little bit nervous, as I understand how important the first week is to setting the tone of a class. Emma taught the opening class and did wonderfully. I received very positive feedback from the students, most of whom were true freshmen and women. She was able to get the students to start thinking about how they defined “religion” and to other, more expansive ways of thinking about what we call “religion” and “spirituality.” I honestly would not have trusted many graduate students with this important task but Emma is special. She is the most professional graduate student I have ever encountered and worked with, and she will make a fantastic professor in the near future.

Emma Rifai is an excellent teacher. She is smart, funny, organized, and she truly enjoys her job. Students see how much she cares about her profession and they respond favorably.

With all good wishes,

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