



**COLLEGE OF  
LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES**

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To: Emma Rifai  
From: Leslie A. Schwalm  
RE: Teaching evaluation, Fall Semester 2016

In the fall of 2016, I had the opportunity to work with Religious Studies Ph.D. candidate Emma Rifai in my course, HIST: 4280:0001 Women & Power in US History [cross-listed as GWSS: 4280]. Ms. Rifai, who was enrolled in GRAD:7400:0001 (650:380:001), her teaching practicum, worked with me to develop a teaching plan for her work over the course of the semester. Ms. Rifai defined three key goals: sharpening her ability to identify and promote key concepts and challenging material from the class using dynamic classroom exercises; developing and applying techniques that promote active learning and high-level student engagement; and applying her GWSS certificate training in developing an inclusive classroom environment that valued a variety of student perspectives.

We agreed that the best opportunity to pursue these goals while further developing her own teaching philosophy was for Ms. Rifai to

- (1) attend and participate actively in each class meeting (as both a student and an observing, teacher in training),
- (2) meet regularly with me over the course of the semester to discuss teaching techniques and exchange ideas about the progress of the class, and
- (3) plan and lead four class discussions over the course of the semester.

I am pleased to report that Ms. Rifai demonstrated superb teaching skills. This was evidenced, first, by her careful attention to developing structured and thoughtful discussions in both small-group and large-group conversations that valued and promoted wide-ranging responses to course material, secondary readings, and close readings of primary documents. Secondly, Ms. Rifai developed specific class activities that required students to be physically active: getting up, moving, and collaboratively using the blackboard, students learned to work together in engaged and productive ways to carefully assess course material in their own words (using tables and Venn diagrams). Finally, Ms. Rifai consciously modeled critical thinking in the way she led class discussions and engaged with students. In particular, she modeled ways in which classroom members could agree and disagree with each other respectfully and productively. Furthermore, she carefully engaged with each student's observation, provided positive encouragement, while

also pushing students to develop their critical thinking skills. In this fashion, she very successfully modelled a collaborative model of learning.

In sum, I regarded Ms. Rifai's work last semester as tremendously valuable for the students, and as an excellent example of a fully-engaged, creative, highly-skilled and thoughtful teacher at work. Ms. Rifai's carefully-developed lesson plans greatly enhanced student learning, while also highlighting the value of collaborative work. In addition, she was a valued collaborator over the course of the semester, and her contributions were important to the overall success of the class.

Sincerely,

Leslie A. Schwalm  
Professor of History and of Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies