



Prescott College

For the Liberal Arts, the Environment, and Social Justice

April 20, 2015

I am writing a letter of the strongest possible support for Bethany Hannah and her application to the Fellowship offered by the NEH's Division of Research Programs. I am Bethany's Core Faculty member for her Master of Arts degree offered by our MA program in Environmental Studies here at Prescott College, Arizona. I am also the chair of that program since 2010. As such, I have worked closely with her as she progressed through the formative and summative hoops of our program and through the oral and written presentations of her impressive thesis.

With approximately 10 – 15 new students a term, we attract a broad spectrum of traditional and non-traditional students most of whom are currently professionals in their fields who choose to now earn a MA degree. While our students range widely in their talents, we continue to attract several students who could have chosen to attend any school in the nation as their training, talents and performances reveal. Additionally, with our strong and repeated use of external academic talent in the formation of our student's theses committees, we receive further substantiation of the abilities of some of our students to perform at the nation's highest standards.

Of this sub-sub-set of our students, Bethany still shines most brightly. From her first semester here, I have regularly and repeatedly used her work as the models for other students. As such, she remains the one (further-along) student in our program whom others are most eager to meet as they have read so many of her former works as their guides and examples. I showcase her work for the simple reason that she consistently produces excellence on both oral and written presentation fronts. Her topics are compelling. Her arguments are cogent and provocative. Her presentation is flawless and her writing sublime. Beyond that her communications with her committee have been open, positive and effective. She has managed committee expectations like a professional and her thesis is the finest example we currently have within the program. In short, Bethany has been the consummate student/-scholar.

Normally, I would balance such praise with peripheral elements in need of further improvement but I see no room for improvement—merely ever-more expansion and development of her skill sets. I provide such praise from a perspective that is distinct from my time here at Prescott College. Trained in the remorseless Research One environment of the University of Michigan's graduate programs, I have developed a sharp eye for breaks in rigor and cracks in performance. That said, my lack of critique about Bethany's performance is wholly uncharacteristic of me during my 20 years of teaching at various universities and colleges including one of the nation's most selective schools: Deep Springs College.

Bethany also combines two intellectual abilities that are essential for most compelling academic efforts: she effortlessly understands the broader and deeper context within and upon which she builds her own scholarship *while* demonstrating remarkable deftness in navigating and crafting the nuanced details that underlie her scholarship. As such, Bethany has what it takes to produce excellence in scholarship as revealed to us through her thesis hot off the press.

Beyond even this, Bethany combines her intellectual prowess and unflinching production excellence with some wonderful personality traits that are regrettably uncommon among such high-performers /

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over-achievers. Bethany is calm and unpretentious (perhaps to a fault). Bethany is modest and compassionate. Bethany is selfless, generous and effective in her support of her peers. As such, Bethany merges tremendous intellectual capacity with a laudatory work ethic with compassion and grace.

In summary, Bethany is our best student since my arrival 5 years ago and among the very best of the thousands of students have taught at four universities over 20 years in a career that has moved as my family evolved. She earns my very highest recommendation.

I am open to taking any specific questions or going into further depth on any issue mentioned or implied.

Peter M. Sherman

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