

August 19, 2012

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to recommend Sasha Bridger. I have known Sasha throughout his undergraduate career here at the University of Vermont, it is my pleasure to recommend him to you with the utmost enthusiasm.

Sasha Bridger was an outstanding student at the University of Vermont, and he will benefit your program in a multitude of ways. Of all the students whom I have had the pleasure of teaching, Sasha is one of the top two or three. His commitment to intellectual inquiry and to challenging received wisdom is second to no one that I know, even among professors. I have had Sasha in five classes during his time here, and in each one, from the intermediate film theory course to the advanced senior seminar, he stood out as one of the top students in the class.

Sasha has encountered difficult material in my courses—the thought of Immanuel Kant, Jacques Lacan, Giorgio Agamben, and Slavoj Zizek. But on every occasion, he has proven himself to be adequate to any challenge. He never dominated classroom discussion, but his few well-placed comments always seemed to shape subsequent responses, including my own. This stood out to me most clearly in the seminar on the work of Zizek that Sasha took during his final semester at UVM. Rather than taking it easy during his last term, Sasha elevated his level of engagement. During the course, he provided an example of what Zizek calls ideological ethics—purportedly ethical acts designed to make us feel better while actually accomplishing nothing. He pointed out that recycling served precisely this function, that it finally wasted more energy than it saved, but that we did it solely because it made us feel like we were doing our part to save the planet. This was, for Sasha, ideology in action. Of course, Sasha was not arguing against recycling, but just against the ideological role that it played in student life. This metaphor became an anchoring point for the class and really helped to clarify Zizek's idea for the other students. I myself returned to it again and again. This is just one of many instances where Sasha, with his theoretical bravado and insightful commentary, set the tone just from the position of a student. I imagine that as a teacher this ability will serve him extremely well.

The level of sophistication in Sasha's thought allows him to stand out among undergraduates. In the classes that he has taken with me, he has produced essays that could have been written by the best graduate students and even some that I thought potentially publishable. Grading Sasha's papers was never a chore because I always learned something new about the theorist on whom he was writing. His writing was clear and to the point, as well as being utterly sophisticated.

All of the qualities I have mentioned above are important, of course. But I would like to conclude with what I think is most special about Sasha--and the paramount reason why he would be a great asset to your program. Sasha is an engaged and engaging human being. He electrifies a classroom with his passion for analysis and critical thinking. At the same time, the genuine warmth of his character makes him a pleasure to interact with. When Sasha

graduated from the University of Vermont, I lost a treasured colleague more than a student.

Unlike other students at UVM, Sasha worked to help fund his education. I would often see him at the bagel store serving bagels for breakfast, and this astounded me even more. He was able to be a top student while working at the same time. He never performed lower than A-level on any assignment or in the making of a bagel.

Sincerely,

Todd McGowan