

**21 June 2020**

**To Whom It May Concern,**

I first met Matt Hernandez at as a Junior at UNC Chapel Hill in 2017. I was a first-generation college student from rural North Carolina, and my experience in college at this time was filled with struggles – I was in my junior year and had never established a feeling of belonging in Carolina academics.

My first class with Matt, *Ethics of Peace, War, and Defense*, was a required course for my major and my first introduction to philosophy. What I quickly noticed is that Matt led their course in stark difference to the previous courses I had taken. It's not often that an instructor has the ability to successfully teach a difficult concept to students with very different learning styles, but Matt is one of those instructors. They did a great job taking philosophy and teaching it in a tangible way. They were enthusiastic about the material, and that enthusiasm noticeably trickled down to the entire class.

Most importantly, their facilitation of the class gave every student a platform to speak. Matt placed class interaction at the center of their teaching style and their engagement was extremely effective at pushing students to invoke thoughtful discussion, without ever discounting someone. They had the ability to lead the class in a manner respectful to each individual, and made sure to only tolerate respectful conversation. Not only did Matt create a space for students to build an opinion and have a platform to discuss that opinion, but they pushed every student to reexamine and critically analyze their established views.

The following year, in 2018, I graduated from UNC, and in looking back, Matt's classes provided me the confidence to have a voice in my final year. I'd always felt a massive disconnect from my peers and that intimidation often stifled my class engagement. Matt did more for me personally and academically than nearly any other instructor at UNC – they provided a space where I felt validated, where I knew my perspective mattered. They encountered each discussion with charity.

Over the course of my time at Carolina, I was lucky enough to take two classes with Matt and I can confidently say they are a rarity at UNC - they're one of those people you encounter and without ever really noticing, provides you with a sense of belonging. They were one of the most passionate and welcoming instructors that I encountered.

**Best Regards,**

Kate Gibson

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