

To Whom It May Concern:

I have interacted with Dr. Ryan Jessup extensively, as both a teacher and mentor, for the past five years. Because of how well I have come to know him, I would like to comment on both his teaching and his mentorship.

Having taken three courses with Dr. Jessup, I can confidently say that he is one of the most engaging, effective teachers I have ever had. As my Research Methods and Consumer Behavior professor, Dr. Jessup always lectured in a down-to-earth, easy-to-understand manner. I remember sitting in his Research Methods course, listening to him, and thinking, “wow, he must want us all to feel very smart,” because he so smoothly and easily broke various theories down for us that even people with no prior knowledge of the topic could confidently follow the lecture along. No one could possibly claim that his teaching was too difficult to mentally grasp. He did not stop there, however. His open manner of lecturing naturally welcomed appropriate comments and discussions. Because of this, not only did we feel comfortable verbally making connections between theories we had learned in other classes and the ones he was teaching us, but we also felt welcome to ask him and each other questions, and confident enough to answer each others’ questions out loud. Naturally, this unified the students, created more space for collaboration, increased our engagement, and ultimately maximized our learning.

Dr. Jessup is also, by far, the most motivational professor I have encountered. As business students, we were all fearful of large datasets and complicated statistics towards the beginning of Dr. Jessup’s Data Mining course. Resultantly, he would regularly encourage us by reminding us that he himself used to be scared of quantitative courses and topics, believing that he could not understand or succeed at them. He would continue by explaining that through slow and gradual attempts at understanding the statistical and quantitative concepts, he became successful, and that, just like him, we could be too. He always encouraged us to change our perspectives of ourselves from being non-quantitative people to ones that *are* capable of succeeding at statistics, which helped remove the large barrier to learning statistics that almost all students have. In addition, Dr. Jessup continually reminded us that if we worked hard now, we would develop the rare and enviable quantitative skills employers would hire us for, later. He would even show us job descriptions that supported his point to keep us motivated. Finally, he always gave us the impression that he was confident in our abilities to work hard and learn the material effectively. His constant motivational efforts, combined with his continuous availability to meet with us and answer any of our questions, are the reason that even the students in the class who initially felt helpless and unintelligent kept practicing and working hard enough to successfully completing his course.

It is because of Dr. Jessup’s skills and efforts that I was able to start a top-tier doctorate program so far ahead of the other first year students in my quantitative courses. Professors continually raised their eyebrows in surprise and commented at the knowledgeable statements I was making regarding their data analysis techniques and mathematical modeling choices. Additionally, students would constantly ask me how I started graduate school having learned concepts and techniques only second and third year PhD students were exposed to. Of course, everything I knew that impressed and bewildered my professors and peers, I had learned in Dr. Jessup’s course and because of his skilled teaching, constant attention, and unceasing motivation.

Not only is Dr. Jessup a talented teacher, but he is also an outstanding research mentor. Similar to the ideal parent, Dr. Jessup effectively balances hands-on guidance with giving me space for growth. When I first started conducting research with him, I barely had any experience with it. During those first two years, he would spend countless hours at the white board in his office animatedly explaining concepts that were novel to me in the field of cognitive neuroscience. He never made me feel unintelligent for not understanding them, or for forgetting what he taught me in the prior meeting. He also patiently taught me about the different components of researching, including the data collection process, the most effective strategies to use when crafting a manuscript, and the difficulties of getting one published. He also kept an open mind to my research ideas, never putting them down, but rather, always encouraging me to keep reading and asking novel questions.

Too much hands-on guidance may increase success in the short run, but it may foster codependence in the long run. To avoid this, as I gained more experience in later years, Dr. Jessup made sure to balance being hands-on with conveying his confidence in my abilities to independently work, and giving me the space to solve various writing and data collection issues apart from him. In short, Dr. Jessup equipped me with the necessary knowledge to work effectively, as well as the skills and mentalities needed for me to confidently complete large research tasks. As a result, upon starting my PhD program, I was the only first year in my program not to feel overwhelmed with how independently I was expected to work and problem-solve. Other students kept reiterating how unprepared they felt, and how unaccustomed they were to independently managing research projects, whereas I felt capable of this because of how intentionally Dr. Jessup had prepared me. Thus, I was the only student to start off her first semester by being handed a \$1.6 million dollar dataset and 3 full-time employees to manage in order to complete data analysis and publish the findings. This would have been an impossible assignment without Dr. Jessup's strategic and selfless mentorship prior to my arrival at the University of Maryland.

Not only did Dr. Jessup ensure that I got the best training possible as an undergraduate researcher, but he also mentored me closely throughout the graduate application process. He started doing so strategically, beginning the preparation process three years before I was due to apply to graduate school. He was very transparent with me about exactly what it was that prospective advisors look for in their students, and what exactly was missing from my curriculum vitae to make it competitive. From advising me regarding the statistics and computer programming courses I needed, to helping me choose research projects to undertake with different faculty members at ACU (to broaden my research experience), he did everything to ensure that my curriculum vitae looked the best it could. Furthermore, when application season began, he worked hard to help me craft a statement of purpose that would appeal to the highest tier research university I could possibly want to appeal to. Even though his expertise was not in my desired future field of study, he still worked to connect me to any researcher he had a relationship with in other institutions who could help me get a great graduate experience in my chosen field. As a result, he helped me get accepted into five of the seven institutions I applied to for graduate school, including Columbia University. Moreover, I was repeatedly told by my primary advisor, who is world-renowned and knew what prepared students looked like, that I was one of the most impressive and prepared students she had ever had start at her lab. I attribute all this to Dr. Jessup's mentorship.

Dr. Jessup could have already been perceived as the most sacrificial and successful mentor available at ACU had he only mentored me academically, but he went beyond that: he helped mold me into a better person spiritually and socially. I broke down in tears in front of Dr. Jessup numerous times, and in each instance, he stopped working and spent long periods of time helping alleviate my worries about my current workload, graduate school, research, and even friendships. He taught me how to keep things in perspective. He would also set aside time to discuss the spiritual climates present in large research universities and theological stances most academics took in order to soften any shock that could have occurred during my transition, and to encourage me to prepare myself spiritually. Finally, he was also open about his personal experiences and the career choices, each time pointing out mistakes that he made in the hopes that I would learn and not make them as well.

In sum, Dr. Jessup is a phenomenal teacher and mentor. He not only explains things simply, but continuously motivates his students, keeps them engaged, and spends hours meeting with them to help them succeed in his classes. He is also a prolific research mentor, one who is willing to spend hundreds of hours teaching his mentees about the best practices in research, to give them rare and valuable hands-on experience, and to be completely transparent about the hardships in research to prepare them for a career in academia. Furthermore, he goes to unimaginable extents to prepare his mentees for graduate school, as can be seen through the overwhelming success of each of the students he chose to mentor. He is the most valuable asset to business and psychology students at Abilene Christian University, and the institution is extremely fortunate to have a faculty member who strategically and intelligently sacrifices for, loves, and mentors students for success the way he has. I hope that all his efforts are rewarded through his being tenured. If you have any further questions about Dr. Jessup, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

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