

Application Related Information

Application: Application Verified
Grad Program Applying To: MES

Iteration Name: 202410_GR_G
Program Name: MES

Recommendation Information

Recommended By: Alejandro Acevedo-Gutierrez
Recommenders Institution: Western Washington University

Recommenders Title: Professor
Contact Name: Amanda Rueda

Waive Access to Recommendation Ltrs: I choose to waive my right to review this recommendation.

Recommendation Waiver Choice:

Recommendation Form Submitted: ✓

Recommendation Status: Received

Received Date: 10/23/2022 08:12 AM

Recommender Assessment: I recommend this applicant without reservation.

Recommendation Type: General

Recommender Form: Letter of Recommendation

Recommendation Entity ID: 1024000108310530

Recommendation Owner: Josephine Bernier

Recommender Form Questions

How long have you known applicant:

Applicant ability as self-directed learner:

Time since last contact with applicant:

Applicant as productive member of group:

Relationship with Applicant:

Applicant most significant strengths:

Ability to complete rigorous grad program:

Responsibility/reliability:

Communication Skills - Oral:

Communication skills - written:

Service Orientation-sensitivity/empathy:

Ability to work independently:

Ability to handle stress:

Ability to think critically:

Ability to analyze/problem solve:

Ability to think creatively:

Openness to feedback:

Potential for leadership:

Ability to work in a team:

Personal/professional reflection:

Description Information

Description:

Form URL: <https://evergreenstatecollege.radiu>

Other Information

Created Time: 10/20/2022 12:16 PM

Created By: Josephine Bernier

Modified Time: 10/23/2022 08:12 AM

Modified By: Josephine Bernier

22 October 2022

To whom it may concern:

I am enthusiastically recommending Ms. Amanda Rueda for entry into the Masters of Environmental Studies Program at Evergreen State College. I knew Amanda for three and a half years (44 months), she was my academic advisee, a research assistant in my lab, a student in an upper-level class with me, and a mentor in a summer class that I taught for migrant high-school students. The assistant positions in my research lab are unpaid, yet we routinely receive dozens of applications every time we post an opening. Thus, the process to select a student is rigorous and involves a resume, written statements and, if further warranted, an interview in person. The selection process is carried out by senior mentored students managing the research in the lab. They were all impressed by Amanda's application because it was clear, concise, and well presented; further, she came across in the interview process as responsible, engaged, thoughtful, and dynamic. Given my prior experience with her as an academic advisee, I was not surprised by the impression she left in my students. The time in which Amanda volunteered in my lab merely confirmed the wisdom of the decision to invite her to join us.

I first met Amanda on November 15th, 2018, when she came for academic advice since she was struggling in adapting to Western after transferring with her Associate of Arts' degree from Centralia College. This meeting caught my attention because in my experience it is quite unusual for students to reach out to their academic advisors, mostly because of how daunting the prospect of speaking with a professor feels to students. At the same time, few students openly and candidly acknowledge their struggles with professors as Amanda did. We made a plan for graduation and I thought that Amanda might not succeed based on prior experience with other advisees. Although Winter quarter of 2019 was very difficult for Amanda, she continued reaching out to me for advice and pulled through remarkably! I am quite impressed about how her performance and joy in school blossomed over time, and quite happy about being wrong in doubting her. I have academically advised over 350 students and I rank Amanda among the top 5% of academic advisees: she was proactive, responsible, and fulfilled commitments. Her Bachelor of Science degree in Biology as a testament to her dedication, resilience and motivation.

Between January 2019 and December 2020, Amanda assisted mentored undergraduate students and one of my graduate students in examining the foraging behavior of individual harbor seals at Whatcom Creek in downtown Bellingham, WA. In the field, along with another student, her tasks were to survey the creek, photographically document the occurrence of harbor seals, and record the behavior of individual seals on a worksheet; in the lab, her tasks were to clean the equipment and input the data into the computer. Amanda was outstanding: she was reliable, detailed, punctual, and motivated; collecting data even in very cold and rainy weather, and processing the information accurately and timely. What most impressed me about Amanda was her willingness to go above and beyond what was requested of her. To quote my graduate student: "She's very communicative and has great attention to detail. In fact, she noticed an error in my instructions to students last spring and texted me about it immediately. If she hadn't caught that mistake, my summer would have been much harder! She's also the only student in the lab who expressed earlier that she wanted to volunteer for remote photo work this quarter [Fall 2020 during the pandemic] and then ACTUALLY DID IT! Many students said they were interested, but then understandably fell off over the course of the quarter. Amanda stuck to it and even signed up for a time that she was committing to working each week. Again, the only student to do that. Overall, I've been impressed by her maturity, communication, and follow-through." I quote my graduate student because her experience with Amanda has been my experience working with Amanda as well.

One telling example of the positive influence of Amanda was her presence in our research lab discussions. These are weekly meetings that graduate students and mentored undergraduate students are obligated to attend; research assistants such as Amanda were at the time encouraged, but not expected to attend. However, Amanda attended those meetings regularly and performed all assignments superbly: reading scientific papers, writing summaries, and preparing questions. Whether we discussed scientific papers, the process of science, or life as a scientist, she always provided thoughtful, respectful, and precise ideas and opinions, which


clarified points or offered new venues for discussion. Amanda is easily in the top 15% of the 200 research assistants that I have had in my lab, quite an accomplishment since I have been fortunate enough to have incredible research assistants who are nowadays leading scientists.

During the Fall quarter of 2020, Amanda took my upper-level *Biology of Marine Mammals* course. Although the course was taught remotely due to the pandemic, the format and expectations were still the same as past courses: students were required to understand complex concepts in evolution, physiology and ecology, to design a conservation-based study, to review another student's proposed project, and to give a presentation on a conservation issue of their choice. Amanda was an outstanding student. I was impressed by the depth of her ideas, the insightfulness of her questions, and the clarity of her writing. I still remember grading the research and conservation presentation that she gave on morbillivirus in marine mammals and how astounded I was about her work: crisp, concise, accurate, current, and relevant. It was easily one of the best presentations I have heard in the many years that I have taught the class. She earned an A in the course, reflective of her ability to excel in a challenging and demanding class, particularly during these troubling times. The class also confirmed Amanda's ability to work well with other people: students were randomly assigned into breakout rooms of four at the start of each day to solve problems and answer questions. She distinguished herself for interacting well with all the students, while gently assuming a facilitating role that kept the group on task and engaged in high-level conversations. I rank Amanda in the top 10% of the 249 undergraduate and 3 M.Sc. students who have taken the course.

During June-July 2020 I first taught a biology course offering migrant high-school students an opportunity to earn science credits and thus be able to graduate. At Western, this program is called Dare2Dream and, unfortunately, I have only been able to teach it remotely due to the COVID19 pandemic. The course includes an academic portion where students learn about biology and science using student-centered pedagogy and a mentoring portion where students learn about college life and opportunities. Although the academic portion is led by a high school teacher and me, we rely on young mentors to work with students in small groups (online breakout rooms) to guide and assist them. Understandably, most high-school students are reluctant to participate and share their ideas in the class, as such we require mentors with the personality and knowledge to provide a safe and enriching environment that elicits the best of each student. When the director of the program asked me if I knew of potential mentors for 2021, I immediately thought of Amanda, who would be graduating from Western just at the time of the course. It was a joy working with Amanda again! She was an incredible mentor. The students opened up to her, sharing their ideas and responding to the curriculum prompts in her breakout rooms. She was gentle and persuasive with them, yet firm and unyielding, asking prompting questions in a constructive and kind way and using silence effectively to provide a safe environment for students to thrive. And they did thrive! At the end of the course, students were more confident and eager to participate in the class, demonstrating not only an understanding of the subject but also personal growth and belief in their ability to succeed academically and attend college. It was sad then that Amanda was unable to be a mentor again in this year's course. We sorely missed her.

Amanda is an outstanding student who excels as a team member or independent worker, interacts well with people, is academically strong, has experience in the process of science, and is a wonderful colleague due to her gentle, poised and mature personality. She will be an accomplished and productive member of the Masters of Environmental Studies Program at Evergreen State College.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Cheryl Owen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Cheryl" being more prominent than the last name "Owen".