

27 September, 2007

Dear Colleagues:

This is a recommendation on behalf of **Andrew Nevai**, an outstanding teacher who is applying for a faculty position. As a Teaching Assistant at UCLA, in addition to his very extensive service in mathematics courses, he also assisted in courses in computing as part of the UCLA Program in Computing (PIC), under my direction. This program is a unit of the Mathematics Department with the responsibility for teaching programming and other aspects of computing to undergraduates in our College of Letters and Science¹. His versatility has extended to being a TA for a course in mathematical biology.

Because of our confidence in Andrew's teaching ability, in addition to assisting in regular courses he was several times selected to teach courses on his own. One such was PIC 1S, a lab course in basic principles of computing, where he designed and delivered presentations, merely consulting weekly with me. Another was a special version of the same course offered in the summer to students in our Academic Advancement Program, supporting students from a variety of backgrounds as part of their orientation to UCLA. Here he did an excellent job in the face of multiple challenges.

Still another course was a competitively awarded opportunity to teach a seminar for mostly non-mathematics majors as part of our college honors program. His topic was "Cover-ups, conflicts, and controversies in mathematics." Reportedly it was quite successful.

As mentioned, the quality of Andrew's teaching for us was outstanding. We collect anonymous student evaluations. In many courses, his averaged over 8 on our 9-point scale! Here are some typical student comments from just the last PIC course he handled for us (Intermediate Programming); other courses were similar:

¹PIC is different from the UCLA Computer Science Department, which teaches Engineering students.

“Andrew was one of the best TA’s I’ve ever had. He always came to discussion extremely well prepared and knew exactly what we were confused about. It was obvious Andrew wanted us to do well by the way he taught. Thanks to Andrew’s help I feel I have been prepared to succeed in this class. Thank You!!”

“Andrew is incredibly clear and concise... He does such a great job, he’s hard to critique. He puts tremendous effort into teaching and maintains a very very useful web page. He deserves more money!”

“The TA possesses great teaching skills, and he is a great listener, excelling in his ability to understand the needs of his students. He is considerate, caring, and at time hilarious. Overall, he is a great TA and will make a great professor some day.”

“The web page with the solutions from class was a great resource... He was extremely concerned about getting us to grasp the material. He’s the reason I understand C++ as well as I do... He was very approachable and always fielded our questions... He was extremely well prepared.”

“By far the best/most effective TA I’ve had at UCLA thus far. Web page and Virtual Office Hours [an on-line bulletin board] very helpful. Learned much more from TA than professor... Goes through IMPORTANT stuff so we know what’s relevant. Overall just a great TA!”

“Excellent job!!... One of the very best TA’s I have ever had and if you decide to pursue a teaching career you will most definitely be very successful. Good luck in the future and may the force be with you!”

“Andrew is a great TA. He’s very helpful. Good examples in class. Everything was done very well.”

“I really enjoyed the trip to the Botanical Gardens... Your class webpage was really effective in helping me understand how to do the homeworks, exams, etc... Great job!”

“... available outside of office hours, which was great.”

“I think Andrew was a great TA...”

“Andrew has been very helpful when it came to the assignments. I believe it was worth my time going to his office hours and discussion sections.”

“...he is *very* encouraging...I am usually hesitant to ask questions in class, but I never felt this in his section. I love the fact that knows *everybody's* name; that makes all the difference in the world...”

“Andrew was a wonderful TA!”

“Andrew was great!! Don't change a thing!!”

Looking also at one-line written comments collected from instructors for whom he worked, I see “Excellent”, “Very good TA”, “Students found him very helpful”, “A+ OUTSTANDING”, “Excellent TA”, “Worked independently—good job.”

His additional experience since then in many areas complements what he did for us. Needless to say, I recommend Andrew Nevai very highly for any teaching responsibility.

Sincerely,

Kirby A. Baker
Professor of Mathematics Emeritus
Director, UCLA Program in
Computing through June, 2005