

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my pleasure to write this letter of recommendation for Emily Herbst. Emily Herbst was my Peer Mentor for a first-year-student only section of Mathematics and Decision Making during the Fall 2014 semester at the University of Northern Iowa. Peer Mentors at the University of Northern Iowa are required to take UNIV 3186: a course specifically designed to develop their skills as first year peer mentors. In addition to working closely with their faculty member, they also take this course which requires training, readings, assignments, and support from first-year specialists on campus. It is an academically serious program. In the 2013 – 2014 academic year, Emily was a Peer Mentor for UNI's two-semester Cornerstone Class, a course which combines our written research/communication course, our oral communication course, and first-year content. She asked if she would be able to serve as a Peer Mentor again, this time for a math class, and she was granted permission to do so because of the good work she had done as a peer mentor for Cornerstone.

Emily went beyond “doing what she was asked to do” to being a real educational leader in the course. For example, she asked me if she would be able to hold review sessions outside of class. I said, “of course,” expecting her to hold one or two; but instead she made them a regular occurrence, particularly around exam time. Before each round of sessions, in her meeting with me, she asked insightful questions about the course, and came up with some fairly sophisticated outlines of topics to guide these sessions. We had agreed at the beginning of the semester that she would substitute for me on one pre-arranged day, and we had a lesson plan prepared for that day. However, on two other occasions that semester I was hospitalized, and Emily had to substitute with very little notice. She did an outstanding job. On one of those occasions, I trained her to do a SGID (Small Group Instructor Diagnosis) on the class, a process that sometimes intimidates even seasoned professors. Her SGID went off without a hitch, and I got excellent feedback from the class as a result, including a suggestion that I will adopt every time I teach Math and Decision Making.

Emily also went above-and-beyond as far as her own assessment of her performance. She created an evaluation instrument for feedback from the class on her performance, and requested my permission to administer it electronically. The results of the evaluation were outstanding. For example, one question asked, “How helpful was your TA?” On a scale from 1 – 4, one student gave her a 3 and the remainder of them gave her a 4.

At the end of every one of my exams, I have this last question: “Give me your initial impression as to the fairness of this test. Did it cover what you thought it would cover? Was it too long or too short? Was the difficulty what you expected?” This semester, every exam would have a large number of students who would answer this question by telling me how much Emily helped them learn the material, with private meetings, her famous review sessions, and her office hours.

Having taught this course for over ten years, I was also able to notice that the students did better on the exams, and the homework, than in previous years. I also noticed that the mood of the class was different in previous years. Students were more active and involved, and in general *cheerier* than they have been in years past.

Before the final exam, she created an outline and review sheet, with each topic or sample question cross-referenced to the relevant class lecture or homework assignment, and then created an answer key to email the students after they had a chance to work on it.

As a colleague, she was a delight to work with. When I have a PTA, we meet once per week, usually for about a half hour. Some PTAs I've worked with viewed these meetings as a chance to answer my questions, and get "marching orders" for the next week. Meeting with Emily felt like meeting with a teaching colleague. We discussed the course at a high-level, and it was a better course as a result of our discussions. We also discussed occasional presentations on first-year-student issues that Emily designed and ran.

I would like to close this letter with an email I received the week before finals week, from a student. It was sent to all the students in the class:

Hi guys!

I know a lot of us have gotten help from Emily Herbst this semester in class and outside of class in her study sessions. As you all know, she doesn't have to help us as much as she has, but she still does! So I think we should make sure she knows that we appreciate all she's done for us.

What I'm proposing is that everyone chip in \$1, and we buy her a Scratch Cupcakery gift card. If you can do this, please email me at [email address]. It would be great to be able to give this to her in class on Friday (12/12), or at a study session.

This is time sensitive, so please email me back ASAP!

Thank you,

[Name]

In short, working with Emily has been a delight, and I would highly recommend her for a student teaching position.

Sincerely,
Doug Shaw