

March 13, 2017

To Whom It May Concern,

I was asked to write a few paragraphs about Ms. Tess Wise, who was my Teaching Fellow (TF) in *The American Presidency*, an undergraduate course taught by Professor Roger Porter at Harvard University. My section was led by Tess, and I quickly realized just how lucky I was to have her as a TF. Because the course was taught in a large lecture format, most of our questions and discussions of the material had to be reserved for section. Tess contributed more to my learning than any other TF I've had at Harvard.

Even though her research isn't closely related to the history of the American Presidency, it was obvious that she really knew the material, as well as Professor Porter's expectations of us. It didn't matter whether the question was on information presented in lecture, a detail that could be found in one of the course readings, or even how a current event could be explained in the context of one of the themes of the course, Tess always had the answer. Tess was also one of the most enthusiastic TF's that I've ever had. She had a way of making even some of the more dull material in the course (for example, Organization of the White House Staff) seem both interesting and relatable. She has a friendly, bubbly personality, which really made sections enjoyable.

I think that the quality that contributed most to my learning, however, was Tess's way of making me feel as though she was always on my team. Tess wasn't there to review lecture material for 53 minutes a week and grade my essays. She wasn't there to trick us with "gotcha" questions on some of the finer details of the course readings. She was there to make sure that we all mastered the material, partly for success on the exams and essays, but also for use in our lives outside the course. Even though I took the final exam for the course months ago, I still find myself drawing connections between news regarding the Trump Administration and the themes of *The American Presidency*. Tess made you feel good about participating in discussions. I was never concerned about giving an incorrect response to one of Tess's questions, because I knew that she would prefer that I give a wrong answer, than no answer at all. I never felt embarrassed about being wrong in front of Tess because I knew that she really wanted me to learn, and according to her, it's better to be wrong and clear up confusion in a low-stakes environment than on a final exam.

Tess also made it very clear early on that she genuinely cared about us as individuals. She set aside a few afternoons during the second week of the semester and asked that we schedule a 15 minute meeting with her to discuss what we wanted to get out of the course, our preferred learning styles, and our academic and extracurricular interests. TF's normally make themselves available for an hour or two each week to help with course assignments, but this was the first time that I've had a TF ask to meet with us just for the sake of getting to know us! It meant a lot, and it also set a positive tone for the entire semester. For a lot of students, myself included, it can take a few weeks to warm up to a TF and the other students before they feel comfortable engaging in discussion and asking questions in section. As a life sciences concentrator, I knew that I wouldn't have as extensive a government background as many of my peers in the course. Were it not for this early meeting with Tess, I may have felt self-conscious about my ability to have knowledgeable discussions with them, but instead, I walked into section and felt immediately at ease.

Tess will be an incredible professor, one day, and her students, as I did, will quickly realize just how smart, devoted, interesting and kind she really is.

Sincerely, Student name redacted to protect privacy