

Brewster Hall Box 401
401 Van Buren Street
Syracuse, NY 13210

January 15, 2014

To whom it may concern,

I am Dia Matthews, a current freshman at Syracuse University, and I am writing this letter in support of Professor Tracy Peterchak's classroom teaching as an instructor of the SOC 102 course for the Fall of 2013. The course was titled *Social Problems* and addressed the current major societal issues in America.

One of the attributes I admired most in Professor Peterchak's teachings was her ability, as a white woman, to not ignore white privilege or her own social standing in relations to others. Her awareness instead of the instinctual denial to not include oneself in the systems of oppression one may be complicit in, forced students to realize our own social standings more truthfully. Another great aspect was Professor Peterchak's effective facilitating. She made sure the discussions in class were always relevant and in gear with the readings and lectures. Furthermore, she was never afraid to debate the comments of students whose arguments went against the lesson. I always felt that the instruction was clear and that the tone of the class stayed pertinent and well-structured—a quality I happened to love in comparison to some professors who let overly opinionated students take the class discussions in completely irrelevant directions. The construction of Professor Peterchak's essay prompts was also very specific and got straight to the problem. The prompts were neither vague nor broad but instead extremely focused, which really challenged students to deeply analyze social issues at more advanced and critical levels of thinking. The course also included very well thought out power points, eye opening video clips, and readings that were exceptionally parallel to the class lectures. Professor Peterchak even used spoken word at some point in the class, as a medium to address the issues of gender inequality. She used great methods in including our lives as young adults and helping us to see where we may fit into the larger social constructs of America.

Professor Peterchak also stayed consistent in making sure her students were constantly engaging in our sociological imagination – the ability to connect our individual experiences to the larger world. The key concept helped students realize how much of our issues were actually in our control and furthermore made me question what larger institutions might be responsible for social inequality in America. Professor Peterchak's idea to start the course off with making sure students had not only a clear understanding of what the sociological imagination was, but also that we would make a distinct effort in applying this way of thinking in how we analyze social issues, made students become much more critical of the structural vindications attached to social inequality in America.

I would also like to add that before I came to college, I had no clue of what my social standing was in this society. I knew I was a black girl, a part of a middle-class family. I knew about slavery and that there was a lot of black men in jail. I knew about

racism. But I had come to learn all of these things from such a profound distance. All my life I have thought of true and largely impactful racism like Jim Crow Laws and the 3/5 Compromise to be elements of our nations past, and that racism today meant individual acts of prejudice – a thing of the singular mind. But in one semester my entire line of perspective has been transformed. I have learned of the structural elements put in place, the concrete things, that allow for forms of inequality to still exist. Like the way the 13th amendment makes it perfectly legal to be property of the state if convicted a felon. The amendment never meant much to me until I learned of the war on drugs, the timely crack epidemic that hit the streets of urban impoverished black neighborhoods, and the sudden mass incarceration of black men for drug crimes equally committed in white neighborhoods. Learning about the matrix of domination, the misperception of black culture through white lenses in media, the stigmas on black single mother's that followed the Welfare Reform Act, or Moynihan's racial projection to blame and label the black family structure as a self-perpetuating cycle of poverty, were all startling lessons that have taught me so much about the structured discrimination still very much prevalent in this nation. I have learned that being a black girl means not only am I standing against the oppression of being black, but also against the oppression of being a woman. While I have also learned that I am still privileged in terms of my class and heterosexuality.

Overall, I found this course and the way it was taught to be extremely effective, well organized, and perfectly executed. Professor Peterchak's approach to such large issues was careful yet brutally honest and it was abundantly clear, at all times, that this was a professor who knew what she was talking about. Both the course and the professor have been vital to my newfound understanding of who I actually am as a black girl in America and I would urge this to be a much more mandatory course in our education systems.

Sincerely,

Dia Matthews
Drmatthe@syr.edu
Student, Syracuse University