

Open Letter on Behalf of David Durlach

I wish to highlight David Durlach's unique skill set as it relates to teaching mathematics.

David and I co-taught precalculus courses for several hundred students at Harvard Extension School over 11 years. Students ranged from their 20's to their 60's and committed themselves to a once weekly 3-hour class with objectives ranging from undertaking interesting mid-career changes to fulfilling pre-medical requirements to overcoming fear of math. In general, I gave didactic lectures while David supported our students in every other way including staffing Harvard's Math Question Center, grading and giving feedback on homework, offering unflagging support and encouragement, incorporating innovative technical presentations into class time, and at times giving the lectures.

David truly distinguished himself by combining unequivocal mastery of the technical knowledge with earnest concern for students' well-being and emotional experience. Every day he proved that it was not "one at the expense of the other." As an inventor he understood the math completely and could explain any of our concepts from a variety of angles. Other instructors can do this. But David also takes into account each student's comfort level and style of learning and pauses to understand barriers to learning. David believes fundamentally that students' experience of learning is crucial to their learning success.

One of the tools David used with finesse was to emphasize making learning fun. When teaching trigonometry applications, he brought an oscilloscope with microphone to class in order to breathe life into potentially arcane mathematical concepts: students saw and heard and touched and manipulated cosine waves for themselves. The fact that he was growing his own business as a high tech inventor and artist gave these presentations all the more impact and relevance.

Harvard Extension School recognized our collaboration in the form of a Petra T. Shattuck Excellence in Teaching Award. I know of no other math instructor more dedicated to the "whole person" while engaged in teaching. As a tutor he offers these same skills on a 1-on-1 basis. It is a great honor to recommend him unequivocally.

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