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To whom it may concern:

This is in regards to Dr. Natalie Mountjoy, who was hired as a faculty member of the Department of Biology in the fall of 2017. I served as a Teaching Assistant alongside Dr. Mountjoy for the BIOL 121 lab, which is a freshman level-course designed to reinforce concepts taught in a concurrent lecture.

During the fall semester Dr. Mountjoy provided helpful advice in regards to teaching, classroom management, assessment design, and student-teacher communication. Not only did this prove invaluable to newer teaching assistants we had that semester, but even as a "veteran" instructor, much of it proved useful. Troubleshooting labs gone awry is often something that only comes with experience, and Dr. Mountjoy proved incredibly adept at it over the course of the semester even though she had not taught the lab before. At each weekly lab meeting she provided suggestions to the lab author and invited discussion concerning future directions and revisions each lab would take.

I think that Dr. Mountjoy's suggested revisions will take the lab in a more student-oriented and engaging direction. Many of the labs we currently run, while certainly successful, can fall short of utilizing all available classroom time and often don't include open-ended assessments. Our current labs share themes (as does most things within biology) but most of our lab activities don't call attention to shared themes and concepts, which is something that Dr. Mountjoy's plans will change. Pulling students into the bigger picture will allow them to develop a deeper level of understanding, and many of Dr. Mountjoy's lab activities have them synthesizing and constructing their own plans and experiments, which lets them apply what they have learned directly. This learning-by-doing concept is what labs need to be; forcing students to create their own instructions and troubleshoot their own methodologies is a far more effective method of teaching the scientific method, and it's a far more realistic representation of what it means to pursue a career in the sciences.

In conclusion, I think Dr. Mountjoy is a much-needed addition to this department; I'm confident that over time she will prove to be invaluable. She has an incredible high level of energy and motivation concerning her position and goals, which align with those of the biology department here at WKU.

Sincerely,

Samantha G. Thomas