

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of Melissa LaBonty for the Norman I and Susan G Krinsky Excellence in Basic Science Teaching Award. I am a Senior Chemistry major at Carleton College and had the good fortune to be Melissa's intern for nine weeks this past summer. As this was my first experience in a graduate research laboratory, my primary goal was to learn as much as possible about the research process, from grant proposals and manuscripts to experimental design and lab techniques. After my experiences this summer, I am much more certain of pursuing a career in research and it has everything to do with Melissa's mentorship.

Her passion for teaching was evident from my first day. She walked me through her research goals and previous findings with a slide presentation, building a narrative of *Fibrodysplasia Ossificans Progressiva* through key visuals and a conversational tone. I was grateful for her casual pace that made the information easier to digest. She would periodically ask me "checkpoint questions" to gauge my understanding and would adjust her explanations appropriately. Between the checkpoint questions and her willingness to answer my own, I felt comfortable with the general research questions and methods and felt ready to start working at the bench knowing the context of the work.

After this initial presentation, Melissa continued to teach me both the technical skills and scientific knowledge that made lab work worthwhile and engaging. She patiently walked me through unfamiliar tasks such as dechorionating zebrafish embryos for imaging or staining protocols. When I initially had trouble focusing both eyes in a dissecting microscope, she took the time to trouble-shoot a few solutions with me. Ultimately, she suggested that I should start farther away and slowly get closer, maintaining the two fields of vision separately until they finally came together, and it worked! Having a mentor that could teach both the scientific concepts and the actual lab skills for carrying out experiments was invaluable. By arming me with the "what" and the "why" of the experiments, Melissa allowed me to gain a certain level of independence in the lab and start thinking for myself as a scientist.

And at the end of the day, Melissa was simply someone you'd hope for as a mentor. She has a great sense of humor and kept spirits up even when results were lackluster. She had a broad worldview and welcomed difficult conversations from health policy to gender disparities. As a liberal arts student, I valued this multi-dimensionality and Melissa's readiness to discuss the world context surrounding her research. She was welcoming one-on-one and could present to a group of fifteen individuals with the same approachability and just as effectively. I have complete confidence that Melissa would be a welcomed educator in any biology department she chooses and hope she can be appropriately recognized with this award.

Sincerely,

Patricia Hare
Carleton College Class of 2017