

December 2nd, 2019

To Whom it May Concern,

I am pleased to write this letter in support of my former professor, Suree Towfighnia. As a junior at the Evergreen State College, I had the pleasure of working with Suree over the course of an entire academic year in the program Mediaworks: Representing Power and Difference on Screen. Mediaworks is a yearly program for students serious about the theory, art, and practice of moving image. Students tackled a diverse array of projects, from learning how to shoot on 16mm Bolex, to the ethical representation of marginalized communities, to developing and directing a short film on the subject of each student's choosing. I went into Mediaworks with only an inkling of what it meant to be a filmmaker, and left with the passion, morality, and discipline necessary to pursue a career in the field. This is in no small part the result of Suree's talent, insight, and unwavering dedication to her students.

One of the greatest learning experiences of my academic career was working with Suree and a few other students from the Mediaworks program on an out-of-class project creating short videos that documented a farmworker's tribunal being held in the Washington State Capitol Building. The tribunal focused on the injustices of undocumented peoples working in the berry picking fields of Eastern Washington. Many of the speakers had suffered in silence, as the threat of deportation left them unable to seek help for the crimes perpetrated by their employers and coworkers in the fields. As these brave people gave testimony to a packed room, Suree expertly coordinated multiple camera wielding students to capture the full context of the moment. I was tasked with close ups of the speakers, while a fellow student captured audience reactions to the moving testimony. Another student was charged with capturing a wide angle of the entire event, while another stood by the speaker's microphones in order to record crisp audio to later dub over the footage in post production. Suree created camera footage logs to allow us to organize and timecode the events of the evening, and would later arrange a google document in which each student was tasked with transcribing part of the speaker's testimonials.

In the days following, Suree invited our small team of student filmmakers to her house for dinner, and generously dedicated her free time to helping us shape the hours of footage we had captured into focused, educational tools to inform the public on what happened at the tribunal. We then began the laborious process of post production: cutting footage, overlaying audio, adding titles, etc.. This project was one of my first times utilizing Adobe Premiere, and Suree made sure to set aside time outside of class to help me work through the quirks of the software and check in on my progress. The end result was two four minute videos that were circulated among local community pages on Facebook.

Throughout the entire process, Suree challenged me to consider the ethical commitment documentarians have in terms of representing truth and power in their craft. It was a top priority to grant agency to the speakers, many of whom survived horrendous accidents and workplace harassment on the farms. We had many tough classroom discussions leading up to this project in regards to representation, and how the mishandling of identity can be harmful to our subjects. Suree navigated these discussions with empathy and insight, connecting the topic to relevant documentary films that both mishandled and excelled at representing various communities on screen. She also connected the lessons back to her own experiences as a filmmaker, working with indigenous people in South Dakota on protecting sacred water from uranium contamination. Suree taught me that I wield power from behind a camera lens, and it is my responsibility as a documentary filmmaker to make sure I capture images with honesty and integrity.

Even after completing my year long course with Suree, she kept her office door open and allowed me to come to her with project ideas and questions throughout the duration of my academic career at Evergreen. Suree continually went above and beyond to ensure that my work was supported, my talent was recognized, and my skill threshold was continually improved. She modelled confidence, technical craft, and most importantly, passion. Any university would be lucky to have a teaching faculty as skilled and dedicated as Suree is.

Sincerely,

Andrew Motte