

SIU SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CARBONDALE **COLLEGE OF
ARTS AND MEDIA**

May 16, 2026

Dear Kesiena,

I am writing to offer you my observations of your teaching and thanks for being my teaching assistant for CIN 351/History 351i, *Introduction to Peace Studies* in Spring 2026. The class (32 students) is offered as an interdisciplinary elective in the University Core Curriculum and is a required class for students in the Peace Studies minor. As a class in the university core and in Peace Studies minor, it is interdisciplinary in conception and form – we had students from a dozen majors and at different levels, ranging from sophomore to seniors. The curriculum is organized around readings from evolutionary theory, philosophy, political theory, history, media studies, and political economy. This range is exciting and challenging.

You excelled in your role as a Teaching Assistant. You were a terrific role model. As a graduate student, you did not engage in the discussion, leaving it to the undergraduate students to sort their thoughts out – but the attention you paid to the lectures and discussions, your interest in the subject and engagement with it was palpable. Students observed the mutual respect with which we addressed each other and imbibed the egalitarian nature of collegiate level interactions between students and faculty. Always on time, you helped set up class, if needed.

In terms of teaching, you demonstrated the hallmarks of a compelling teacher. We shared grading (this was a writing-heavy class with reading responses due every two weeks). Your comments to the students were thoughtful and critical as needed. What really struck me was that they were genuinely responsive to each student! There were no formulaic repetitions, each response tailored to the unique student. This kind of authentic response is rare, but it inspires students to do better because they feel seen. For instance, here's your response to a student for their second journal entry, encouraging them for connecting the first few weeks in complex ways:

Thank you for this response to the first weeks of the semester! You engaged deeply with the readings and your previous thinking, to come out as a dialectical thinker-who sees the possibility of change emerging from within the contradictions that exist in society and in our history.

You also taught one class period entirely on your planning the lecture and activities for that day. You chose to speak about the South African experiment with Truth and Reconciliation Commission Hearings after the end of apartheid. You began by asking the students what they understood by apartheid and pushed them to see it as a system of enforced and exploitative segregation in all aspects of life. You then took up the question from the reading assigned for that day (Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Woman Confronts the Legacy of Apartheid*), how does a society overcome hatred? You tied this reading to an earlier reading by

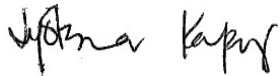
Desmond Tutu, one of the founders of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. Through back and forth questions illuminated by passages from the readings, you explained the underlying logic of TRC, that we must recognize the possibility of evil within us all and how this potential is suppressed or given free leash by the social conditions within which we live. Hence, the need to take both the risk of meeting the perpetrator and transforming the conditions that normalize victims and perpetrators. You discussed the African concept of *ubuntu* and the spiritual need for connection for a fully human life. It was an inspiring class and one of the students, Thandie Kewon, was so taken up that she did her final project on it. She wrote a creative piece where the protagonist is torn as he confronts his own evil desires; a kind of fever dream in response to films like *Robo Cop*. I am attaching her response for you to see.

As a doctoral student in the School of Media Arts and with a background in theater, you brought a rich appreciation of the ways in which the arts express, resist, reinforce, and cope with existing violence. Your attention to writing and grappling with texts enriched the student experience. I am sure they will remember your kindness and willingness to help them for a long time.

It was a pleasure working with you this semester and I hope to be able to do it again.

With all best wishes,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jyotsna Kapur". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jyotsna Kapur

Professor, Cinema and Media Studies