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GEOGRAPHY, ENVIRONMENT, AND PLANNING

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June 1, 2020

Emily Taylor
Personnel Officer, Bureau Chief
California Department of Social Services
744 P. St.
Sacramento, Ca. 95814

RE: Dr. Aynalem Adugna, Employment History

Dear Ms. Taylor,

It is with pleasure that I provide you with some background information on Dr. Adugna's history as an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Geography and Global Studies at Sonoma State University (in 2017, we changed our name to the Department of Geography, Environment and Planning). He began working with us in 1992 and continued into 2012. Within that timeframe, I was Department Chair for about six years. We employed him at every opportunity, and he fulfilled a number of roles.

We especially appreciated his expertise in Population Geography, Medical Geography and Epidemiology. Those fields are often under-represented in American universities, and the University of London (where he earned his degree) has a very strong reputation in those fields. He taught Population Geography and Medical Geography for us at the upper-division level. For each those courses, he had to establish a broad understanding of the field, and explain the latest, cutting-edge research. That was an especially difficult challenge because those fields are heavily steeped in statistics, which can be a major barrier for students. Yet, his evaluations were always excellent. He demonstrated a deep understanding of the research, he presented the information clearly, and he encouraged independent thinking.

He taught Cultural Geography and Social Geography for us as well. Those two fields set population and medical geography within a much broader set of economic, political and social processes. Once again, his evaluations were consistently strong. I can also verify that we asked him to develop a course on quantitative techniques. We were very disappointed that, ultimately, we could not mount it.

Finally, I would like to point out that, in the 1990s, Geographic Information Science (GIS) was only just starting to develop as an area of academic research and as a tool within other academic fields. Dr. Adugna recognized early on that this new tool for spatial analysis would be extremely important within the field of epidemiology. He proactively sought training in it while he was at Sonoma State, and he immediately began integrating the analytical approach within his teaching.

Overall, Dr. Adugna was an esteemed colleague in our Department, and a pleasure to work with.

Sincerely,

Dr. Rheyana Laney
Department of Geography, Environment and Planning

cc.

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