

Anneli Jokela
Redpath Museum, McGill University
859 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec H3A 2K6
(514) 398-4086 ext 3191
anneli.jokela@mail.mcgill.ca

November 8, 2006

To Whom It May Concern:

This is a letter regarding the teaching abilities of Dr. Volker Bahn on behalf of the graduate student teaching assistants for *Methods in the Biology of Organisms*, a second-year laboratory course for Biology undergraduate majors at McGill University. We have had the distinct pleasure to work with Dr. Bahn during two modules in this course, which were designed to introduce students to the topics of experimental design and statistical analysis.

Dr. Bahn prepared three one hour-and-a-half lectures in which he presented basic topics in statistical analysis and experimental design. His descriptions and explanations were both thorough and clear, providing students with an excellent basis for both the analyses they would complete in this course, as well as any future coursework in biometry and ecology. Dr. Bahn prepared PowerPoint presentations that added visual examples and explanations for the students, several of whom specifically requested that these be made available on-line because of their high quality and clarity. During lectures he was able to provide real-world examples to which these concepts could be applied, further improving the students' level of understanding. He speaks very clearly, even when dealing with complex material, and has a relaxed disposition that creates an environment in which students feel comfortable asking questions.

Dr. Bahn also attended teaching assistant meetings. During these meetings, he asked us to provide feedback from previous years concerning areas in which students had difficulties understanding. He successfully integrated these comments into his lecture material, greatly improving both the content and clarity of these sessions for the students. Dr. Bahn responded very well to the level of understanding displayed by the students, adapting his presentation style and explanations accordingly. In addition, he was able to help us as teaching assistants better understand some of the concepts being taught so that we would be better equipped to aid students during the lab and answer questions. Furthermore, Dr. Bahn was present during a portion of the labs so that he could be accessible to and answer questions from, both students as well as teaching assistants.

Dr. Bahn has a unique ability to provide clear and practical explanations for statistical concepts that are often somewhat abstract. His thoughtful and considered descriptions are much appreciated by all of us, in our roles not only as teaching assistants, but as graduate students as well. For example, during one of the teaching assistant

meeting, Dr. Bahn provided a fantastic explanation for degrees of freedom. One of the teaching assistants noted that the graduate students in her lab had just recently discussed degrees of freedom at length, but had failed to come up with such a cogent and elegant explanation. Dr. Bahn also did an excellent job of presenting not only well-established methodologies, but he further gave a general idea of the current state of affairs in biological statistics, for example the decreasing emphasis on hypothesis testing. He encouraged the students to creatively conduct exploratory analyses of their data, which they responded to with enthusiasm. He was thus able to convey how the concepts being taught in the course relate to contemporary biological research.

We believe that Dr. Bahn has excellent teaching abilities, and should be eagerly sought out by any department seeking someone who is motivated by helping students to understand complex but rewarding subject matter, and who is enormously successful in doing so.

Sincerely,

Maria de Boef

Matthew Vavrek

Anneli Jokela

Geneviève Smith

Alexandre Ménard

Cristian Correa

Audrey Heppleston

James Schafhauser

Kathryn Harper