

Jan 10, 1997

Dear Sir or Ms.,

I write in behalf of a former student, Scott Downie, whom I knew and taught while he was a graduate student in the history of science program at Oklahoma Univ. Scott took two classes with me in intellectual history while he was at Oklahoma, and I had the chance to get to know him rather well and to have a number of very long and very frank talks with him about matters both intellectual and personal. I formed a very high opinion of his sheer intellectual ability at that time, and I was disappointed when he decided that a Phd. in the history of science was not what he wanted to do. That may well have been a good decision for Scott; indeed I suspect it was, but he is so talented a guy, and was so much fun to have around, that I managed to convince myself that he might have been a first-rate historian of science.

I think it is not unfair to say that Scott was the most intellectually brilliant student I have ever taught. This quality was not, however, evident to all my colleagues because Scott's brilliance often took unconventional forms, and he seemed to delight in confounding the traditional academic formulas for doing papers, exams, or oral presentations. The high premium Scott put on originality annoyed my more staid colleagues, even though it always delighted me. His brilliance expressed itself in highly original treatments of themes suggested by my take-home exams that Scott would reconstruct and take in directions more interesting to him. He always answered the questions, more succinctly and to the point than anyone else, but he also managed to do a creative and well-documented piece of research on a related matter that cast light on the more general issue, and in a writing style that literally glowed with vitality. It is this feature of Scott Downie's skill that will bear comparison with the best students anywhere. He could easily have been--and may still be--a creative writer of the first rank. His imagination is fertile in the extreme, and his prose style adaptable to the purpose at hand: always clear, always insightful, always energetic.

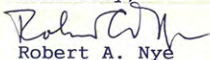
I do not know enough about your law program to comment on the fit between it and Scott's talents, but it seems to me if it requires astonishing skills at written communication, splendid conceptual skill, and an intuitive grasp of language, then Scott is perfect for

you. Scott's work for me was always heavily documented and relied on evidence and argument to make its case. But the scholarly paraphrenalia never weighed down the ideas, which remained sharply etched in the mind of the reader.

Scott has an infectious sense of humor and a view of the world that inclines toward the absurd and the ridiculous. I always thought that made him a genuinely funny and yet genuinely humane man. I frankly think he will prosper in law school. He has, I think, finally figured out what he wants to do with the rest of his life; I can assure you he will do it well.

Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,



Robert A. Nye

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