

To The Members of the Faculty Evaluation Committee,

I am writing this letter in support of Professor Gabriel Vanover. I had the pleasure of observing Gabriel's course, THR 260: The American Musical and its Forms. From my observation of this class, I can say with confidence that Gabriel conducts his classes with a strong sense of pedagogical scaffolding. This is to say that, in the course of one class, Gabriel balanced his content over a variety of activities including a quiz, a student presentation, lecture, and group work. Each one of these activities was tied directly to the course content, which for this class, covered the artistic, social, and historical conditions involved in transition between Golden Age musical theatre and the Mega-Musical form that followed. Above all of this, he was able to keep his students engaged with this material with an enthusiastic and relatable conversation style.

Gabriel's class began with a student presentation on the Broadway Musical, *The Loin King*, which became very salient later during his lecture on the Mega-Musical. This was followed by a reading quiz, which again directly addressed the content of the day's material. Gabriel then gave a lecture on the rise and the progression of the Maga-Musical from antecedents to the 1980s and 90s as they developed on both Broadway and in The West End. This lecture included historical conditions necessary to the transition between Golden Age Musicals and Mega-Musicals. I was incredibly interested to learn that the AIDs epidemic as well as the crime epidemic of the 80s shifted the cultural center of the musical from New York's Broadway to London's West End. He also addressed sociocultural influences, namely how these musical's borrowed aspects of spectacle coming out of the popularity of rock and roll shows in the late 1970s. He connected this to the rise of branding and merchandizing within Western culture, specifically relating this to *Cats*, as it is one of the first successful examples of branding and merchandizing within musical theatre. He explained how all of this attributed to what critics considered a radical shift in the aesthetics of musicals, as many considered the form to have abandoned substance for spectacle.

Gabriel introduced all of this information along with biographical information relevant to major writers and performers within the movements, some of it salacious, and all of it relevant. Perhaps most importantly, all of this content was presented in an engaging lecture style. It was obvious that his students were paying attention. He provided examples, explaining the relevant aspects of them as they played, while constantly asking the class questions. Sometimes in order to get his students to engage with the material, and sometimes just to keep them on their toes.

It was immediately obvious that Gabriel is both respected and admired by his students. He has an approachable and jovial demeanor that his students respond to. I should add that this was something I wasn't surprised to learn as several of my own students had related this to me in the past, unprompted, on more than one occasion. After observing Gabriel, I believe this respect and admiration can be attributed to an enthusiasm that helps draw his students into the material, ultimately helping them to make necessary connections. On the level of pedagogy, this is immensely valuable, and the importance of these sorts of attributes in a professor cannot be overstated.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Saul Lemerond