Dear SUEP faculty,

My name is Renzo Laynes, and I would like to nominate Dr. Mike Baratta for the 2015-2016 Outstanding Faculty Mentor Award. I have worked for Dr. Baratta since the fall semester of 2014, and have come to believe the testimony that your mentor has the ability shape how you experience research. Dr. Baratta has been my mentor for several projects including my BURST research project, both of my research endeavors for the CU Medical Scholars Program, and my current UROP-HHMI project, which I will be presenting at the end of the semester.

Dr. Baratta gives off a very unique first impression. He exudes a very relaxed manner that exemplifies the kind of person he strives to be. During my first interview with Dr. Baratta, I was under the impression that our relationship would be different than that of mentors that I’ve had in the past. Even as I write this letter it feels unnatural to refer to him in a formal manner because in addition to being my mentor Mike has become my friend. He treated me to lunch to congratulate me on doing well on the MCAT, never fails to ask me if I want coffee when he goes to get some himself, and encourages me to travel before I surrender my free time to medical school.

This type of relationship has had an important impact on how I have experienced research. In addition to respecting Dr. Baratta as a mentor and knowledgeable researcher, I also respect him as someone who, because of our friendship, values my goals as important. From the beginning, I was not a bothersome undergrad who could do things for him; I was a student interested in learning, with the potential to become a valuable resource in the lab. With this mindset, in the past year I have become proficient in several techniques in the lab such as: microinjections, transcardial perfusions, tissue extraction, immunohistochemistry, brain slicing and preparation, microscope image analysis and acquisition, data analysis and presentation, and more. Dr. Baratta took the time to instruct me in each of these areas, and made sure I was comfortable enough to perform these techniques on my own. The reason I’ve had the desire to do great work in the lab has to do with the way I view my position in the lab: I have felt valued and appreciated.

The importance Dr. Baratta has placed in my independence has also been very important in my experience as an undergraduate researcher. During my training, his goal was always to elevate me to a state in which I could function effectively without his supervision. As I began to realize that I was able to perform certain tasks, pertaining to research, on my own, I gained an essential confidence and excitement about research that motivated me to continue on this path. Nevertheless, I still feel very much mentored by Dr. Baratta, and I don’t assume this is an easy task to achieve with an undergraduate student.

An essential attribute of a great mentor is the ability to work well with colleagues. I don’t believe there exists anybody in our lab who doesn’t get along well with Mike. His attitude is never one of competition or vehement discord, but one of collaboration and productivity. Not only does this trait serve to his advantage, but it has also provided me the opportunity to discover the work of others on a deeper level through discussions in the hall and passionate scribbling on
a white board. He regards his fellow researchers and PI with the utmost respect, and I have never heard him say an unfavorable comment about any of their work. I am sure that other undergraduates, graduate students, and post-doctoral fellows, would echo these traits about Mike.

If you have had the pleasure to meet Dr. Baratta, it is likely that he has brightened your day with his energetic and witty remarks. If not, I hope that this letter has done justice to the kind of mentor he is to me and has been for other undergraduates who have had the pleasure to work with him. Please, strongly consider Dr. Mike Baratta to be the recipient of an SUEP Outstanding Faculty Member Award. He deserves recognition for his commitment to and passion for research on every level.

Best Regards,

Renzo Laynes
University of Colorado Boulder
Integrative Physiology | Senior
CU Medical Scholars Program
Alpha Gamma Omega | Xi Chapter
Undergraduate Researcher | Maier Watkins Research Lab