

To whom it may concern,

My name is Luke Amaral and I am about to graduate from the University of Maryland with a Bachelors of Science in Biology. My time in College Park has been incredible, the university has so much to offer and I have been able to enjoy many unique experiences. Beekeeping, latin dance, and water polo are some examples of the diverse activities I have been able to engage in, but one stands out above the rest: the TerpsEXCEED program. TerpsEXCEED is an inclusive post-secondary education opportunity for students with disabilities in the state of Maryland. It is clear that the TerpsEXCEED program presents an incredible opportunity for students with disabilities to develop independence and job-related skills which is critical for their growth, but what goes unnoticed is how enriching this program is for students without disabilities.

TerpsEXCEED provides students without disabilities with opportunities to get involved through their peer mentor program. As a peer mentor students without disabilities provide support in the classroom, at extracurriculars, and in daily tasks. Although mentors are there to aid in the development of independence in the TerpsEXCEED students, they are simultaneously being exposed to a wide variety of classes, clubs, and life experiences they never would have had otherwise. One example from my experience was when a TerpsEXCEED student and I made fresh pasta and tomato sauce together. Because of his passion and pride for his Italian heritage, I was exposed to a unique and delicious cultural experience. Although the pasta shapes were irregular and the sauce was a tad acidic, I know I will savor the memories and new skills.

Although that memory is my favorite, I have had a variety of incredible experiences through the program. As an academic support I have attended classes in diverse subjects ranging from Greek Mythology to dance. I have attended club ice hockey and varsity wrestling events with students. I have been to meetings for clubs all about mental health of students. Being involved in TerpsEXCEED led me to all of these experiences that I never would have sought out on my own. The program challenges both students with and without disabilities to go out of their comfort zone and embrace diversity of experience.

My experience in TerpsEXCEED has been deeply enriching to my time in College Park. Through the program, I have been exposed to new clubs, sports teams, and cultural events that I never would have been aware of otherwise. TerpsEXCEED greatly benefits the University of Maryland community as a whole.

Thank you for your time,
Luke Amaral

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Luke Amaral". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'L'.