I used to believe that the most I could learn from a class came from a textbook, until Mr. Montero, prior to AP chemistry one summer, had asked me a seemingly simple but complex question: How is a pump or even a straw able to move liquid from its container to a higher location? When I attempted to respond, I realized from my loss of words and use of “unscientific” jargon how limited my understanding of chemistry was. His patient yet enlightening discussion gave me newfound appreciation for the massive impact that the gases in our atmosphere had on our surroundings. I was also able to imagine what was happening by thinking of molecules and their behavior. Each new concept we discussed in AP chemistry continued to instill in me awe; just like he did to all the students he had previously had for Chemistry honors. It was easy to understand why the students who had him in honors class composed the majority of his AP Chemistry class. Kids want to keep learning with him as he is able to awaken the very first instincts of all children: curiosity and wonder. Using discussion and self-discovery as his chief teaching tools, he displayed to me a truly effective teaching style that easily topped reading the book.

How easily Mr. Montero was able to leave my mind boggled by a subject I once believed I understood so well made me appreciate the subject all the more. The same thing happened to my friend Joseph Levy who is currently a 10th grader at school and a student of Mr. Montero and had this to say about his first experience in his class:

“I will never forget how life changing my first class in Mr. Montero was. The class started with a chemistry demonstration in which Mr. Montero combined two liquids in a bottle and immediately and violently foam erupted out of the bottle even reaching the ceiling. That was really cool but today’s teens see many cool things. What was life changing was when he asked the class for the chemical formula of water. Everyone blurted out H2O, I was even a little insulted by such an obvious question. Then he asked, ‘how do you know that?’ My first reaction was, what is he talking about? Anyone knows that! But he persisted, how do you know that? At that moment I was shocked, I had no answer. I realized I only knew that because I was told by my parents or a teacher and had been repeating it blindly for years. Mr. Montero swept the intellectual rug from under my feet and humbled me. He helped me realize what science truly is, not just knowing things but understanding how and why. Now as an AP chemistry student, Mr. Montero gives me the daily responsibility to tutor and help kids in the honors classes. I have really enjoyed this process and have realized how fulfilling it is to help others learn. As of now, I plan to continue on this path and become a chemistry teacher in the future.”

Where other science teachers’ curriculums stop in the classroom, Mr. Montero’s genuine outgoing nature easily enabled students to reach out for his assistance outside the classroom. Since I was a freshman, I recall staying afterschool late into the evening with upperclassmen working on learning and advancing in chemistry. I was inspired by how Mr. Montero worked with the upperclassmen to prepare them for chemistry competitions. I was also inspired by the resolute commitment of these students to excellence and the sciences. All of these students have now graduated high school and are now attending top universities studying chemistry, engineering or medicine. Now in my senior year I am the leader of that team and I can see myself inspiring those younger than me to continue our school’s tradition, a tradition that would
have never existed without Mr. Montero. Another great aspect of my after school chemistry life was the camaraderie I develop with those who shared my passion for science. We have been and always will be a team of friends. I can best compare it to being in a sports team but instead of a ball or a goal we would work with chemicals and lab equipment.

Three years ago I walked into Mr. Montero’s class a shy 10th grade Haitian girl, still grasping a love for science and now I will graduate this year top of my class and attending California Institute of Technology, proudly pursing chemical aspirations. None of this would have been possible without my teachers, especially Mr. Montero. The passion to wonder that Mr. Montero was able to affirm in me will never be forgotten and will carry me well into my professional career. I recommend Mr. Montero for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science Teaching because he embodies just that, excellence.

Sincerely,

Netgie Laguerre
Dr. Michael M. Krop HS – Class 2013
California Institute of Technology – Class of 2017