

Faculty Senate
Distinguished Teaching Award Committee

Dear Committee Members:

It is my distinct pleasure to write this letter of support for my colleague, Dr. Cheri Young of the Knoebel School of Hospitality Management, to receive the Distinguished Teaching Award. Since becoming a faculty member with University of Denver in September 2013, I have had opportunity to observe Dr. Young and have worked with her in teaching activities. Dr. Young is an exceptional educator. Her teaching has constructively influenced her students as well as junior faculty. In fact, I have been coached by Dr. Young when I began my own undergraduate teaching. Dr. Young is my role model for excellence in all-around undergraduate education.

Dr. Young's general approach is to engage students to become good citizens of the world. Her Human Capital course has embedded an innovative service learning pedagogy that encourages students to mentor refugees to become employees in the food service industry. Students not only apply their learning and skills and work with refugees towards community accomplishments, but also learn the cultural differences in the meaning of hospitality and managing employees. Students develop a sense of appreciation, awe, and wonder as they realize that the U.S. is but a part of a larger world. Abstract news stories about other parts of the world involving war, ethnic cleansing, and religious and political unrest suddenly become concrete when working with someone from these areas. Students' unconscious biases, beliefs, and ways of thinking are examined in a new light, leading to a reduction in their ethnocentrism and an increase in their cultural competence. Dr. Young's example of undergraduate education in her Human Capital Course is inspiring. With grace and a persistent focus on students, she has helped expand learning opportunities for students from repeating textbook materials to real-life experiential learning. Motivated by genuine interest in students and powered by her creativity, I can tell that Dr. Young has truly found ways to educate and develop the whole student.

Dr. Young's endeavors in the area of community-engaged teaching have earned the School and her numerous teaching awards including the Service Learning Faculty of the Year Award by the Center for Community Engagement & Service Learning at the University of Denver (2013), the highly distinguished Worldwide Hospitality Award for "Best Educational Innovation" (2013), recognition of successful refugee resettlement and integration by the U.S. State Department (2014), and the competitive internationalization grant supporting her continuous efforts of developing collaboration programs with less-privileged institutions in Africa by Internationalization Office at the University of Denver (2015). The accomplishments that led to these awards include her own teaching and its effect on students, as well her effect on the public good.

I have visited Dr. Young's classes and have always found them to be stimulating and lively. All of her classes are packed and students always gain a good experience from her classes. Dr. Young's classes are known as challenging, but I have heard students describe her personally as helpful and motivating. There is a common element in their comments. In the words of one student, "Dr. Young challenges

students, questions students, and makes students reach their fullest potential.” Her teaching evaluation is always top of the scale. I am sure this is true for every nominee you are considering, and certainly, knowing Dr. Young as I do, these ratings do not surprise me. What is remarkable is that students give her these top marks while simultaneously noting how hard they have to work in her classes and tutorials. This theme comes through consistently in her student evaluations and feedback that I have heard. She is turning these students on, motivating them to strive academically.

Dr. Young is also genuinely open to students’ informed opinions and eager to grow and learn along with the students. Students needing advice or extra assistance throughout the quarter are always welcome in her office, where she not only helps students with course problems but also provide advice and support to their campus life and career development. She is generous with her time, making herself very available to students at all levels and regularly attending student-oriented campus activities (career fair, direct admission, etc.) to show her support and be more involved in the university. She helps them to participate in every aspect of learning, providing them with appropriate supports to allow them to succeed in spite of their youth.

Dr. Young has a caring heart to help faculty colleagues grow into quality teachers. She does not just focus on her own productivity but also generously provides guideline and advice to junior faculty. I constantly discuss teaching-related issues with her and receive timely feedback on my teaching activities. Because of her patient mentoring, I have received a series of teaching grants from the Center for Community Engagement & Service Learning at the University of Denver to support the development of my community-engaged pedagogy. In addition, Dr. Young is generous and attentive in her collaboration with other instructors. Under her leadership, instructors of four courses at Knoebel (Human Capital, Contemporary Cuisine, Event Marketing Practicum, and Hospitality Information Systems and Technology) have worked closely to produce the annual Public Good Gala which celebrates the partnership between Knoebel and the ACC. In this process, Dr. Young has developed a school-wide atmosphere of implementing service learning pedagogy and enabled instructors who teach similar courses to develop collaborative ideas for community-engaged activities. The knowledge co-created in the collaborative service learning teaching will be the think tank that constantly stimulates new ideas for future hospitality curricula.

Dr. Young’s incredible impact on her students and faculty colleagues, coupled with her innovation in hospitality education, make a compelling case for her to receive the Distinguished Teaching Award. I am honored to nominate Dr. Cheri Young for this award, but I am also honored to have her as a member of our faculty. Dr. Young represents the finest traditions of a great private university dedicated to the public good. She takes students and junior faculty as they are and helps them get where they want to be. I hope you honor her with this award so she can serve as an inspiration to more university teachers. I look forward to her selection!

Sincerely,
Karen Xie, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor