



UNIVERSITY of
DENVER

CENTER FOR COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT & SERVICE LEARNING

February 7, 2014

Dear Selection Committee,

I am delighted to have this opportunity to offer my enthusiastic support for the nomination of Cheri Young for the United Methodist Scholar/Teacher of the Year Award.

I was fortunate to meet Cheri within a few weeks of her arrival at DU when she attended an open house at the Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning (CCESL). We talked that evening about her efforts to advance service learning pedagogy at her last institution. She undertook these efforts because of the learning value she saw for students as well as the potential benefit for community partners. Her hopes for what service learning could be at that last institution did not come to fruition, though she held out hope that DU, with our public good vision, might be the place to more fully put service learning pedagogy into practice.

Several things became evident in that first meeting. Cheri is passionate about teaching and learning; extremely engaging, curious, and open; and someone who leads while learning. I called Cheri within a few days of the Open House to ask her to serve on a service learning advisory committee at CCESL. I also started referring queries her way when community-based agencies contacted CCESL with questions/interests that had the potential to overlap with work in the Knoebel School of Hospitality Management. I was contacted by the African Community Center one day with a need that sounded basic and out of the scope of my world: the agency was looking for a kitchen in which they could teach a class on food safety to adults who were refugees, recently resettled in Denver. I referred the agency contact to Cheri, hoping that perhaps she could find a way for the group to use facilities in her School. I never imagined what Cheri would build with the ACC to advance student learning as well as address community-identified issues.

Reflecting her motivation, commitment, and passion for engaging students in their learning as well as her commitment to using scholarship for the public good, Cheri has managed over the last two years to build an incredible partnership with the ACC. Through meaningful discussions with the ACC, she learned that the ACC's work with adults recently resettled as refugees in Denver had challenges far beyond finding a physical space to teach a course. Cheri and the ACC recognized that the challenges came with opportunities for collaboration, student learning, and mutual benefit. Cheri and the ACC worked together to address the problem of a physical space while also thinking more creatively and critically about the needs of adults resettling in the U.S. (many of whom had very limited English skills) looking for employment in the food service industry along with the learning needs of students in a human capital class. Instead of having students in her course simply read about or have theoretical discussions of human capital, Cheri and the ACC developed an innovative mentoring opportunity that was integrated into Cheri's courses. The mentoring opportunity was designed to be of mutual benefit to the adults resettling and the students learning about management. Each student in Cheri's course is paired with an adult in the ACC program in a protégé-mentee relationship (these terms were developed with the ACC). Through this ACC partnership, Cheri helps students bring to life the skills they will need in their careers to cultivate human capital in employees, grounded in an understanding of diversity and

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cultural competence. The adults in the ACC program got more than a physical space for a food safety class. The student mentee worked with the protégé on skills essential to finding employment (of note, refugees resetting are required to find employment within a particular timespan; thus, help with employment-related skills is no small thing). For example, the student mentee might conduct mock interviews with the protégé, help the protégé prepare a vita, explain U.S. traditions/expectations for interviews, etc..

What has come of this partnership is nothing short of a land slide. The experience has changed Cheri: as she integrated the ACC partnership into her teaching, Cheri pushed herself to do more to flip her classroom so that classes are focused on action and engagement (versus more passive downloading of information from instructor to students). The experience is changing students: students in her courses acquire disciplinary knowledge about the management of human capital as well as build critically important “soft” skills that cannot be learned from a book, but that are absolutely essential to their career paths. The experience advances our goals as an institution: Cheri’s course directly contributes to our goals to educate culturally-competent global citizens. The service learning activities in which her students engage push them in ways that are often new to work with someone from a very different life experience and background; these are the very skills students will need when they seek to enter the job market as managers. And the experience has changed the Knoebel School: Cheri’s teaching provides an innovative and important example of what engaged learning is (including the clear benefits to student learning) and what a course in the context of a university dedicated to the public good can look like. Indeed, the Knoebel School now has a video (produced by DU students) that champions this partnership in terms of the mutual benefit to student learning outcomes and an important community organization

Cheri is now advancing her own scholarship of engagement – that is, the study of how these engaged teaching practices affect student learning and development. In addition, she continues to define and develop her leadership on campus in terms of engaged teaching and scholarship. Through CCESL, she serves as a Faculty Associate. In this capacity, she works to advance meaningful engaged learning on campus and contributes to training and developing other instructors. For example, she is regular presenter at DU and regional training for faculty learning about service learning. Her regional leadership is valuable to DU as is the national attention that her video and course are receiving. CCESL recognized her leadership and accomplishments last year, awarding Cheri the 2013 Service Learning Faculty of the Year.

Cheri is passionate about student learning and the scholarship of engagement. In a few short years at DU, she has emerged as a leader and as an outstanding instructor who brings learning to life for her students. She and her students are making a difference in our community at the same time that they are open to the many lessons they are learning from their community counterparts. The combination of leadership, passion for student learning, willingness to be affected by her students and the community, and commitment to engaged scholarship make Cheri an outstanding candidate for this award.

Thank you for giving Cheri’s nomination serious consideration. If I can provide additional information, please feel free to contact me (303.871.2939, adeprinc@du.edu).

Best regards,

Anne

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