Dr. Gabe Rikard

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To Whom It May Concern:

I am honored to write a recommendation for Jessica Lopez-Barkl for her promotion from Assistant Professor to Associate Professor. For the past three years as an Assistant Professor of the Liberal Arts Division specializing in Theater at SUNY Sullivan, Jessica has been an inspiration to me personally and to our division. No one has worked any harder, logged any more hours, or had to wade through more administrative gobbledygook than Jessica. Her persistence and diligence, her talent and drive, and her knowledge and compassion have imparted wisdoms on SUNY Sullivan theater students that have allowed her to build a program from nothing to a program willing to be daring enough to debut an original play of a new genre, written by an unproven playwright. Jessica is a pleasure to work with; furthermore, her genuine passion for teaching, her uncompromising dedication to the ideals and values of a Liberal Arts education, and her empathetic compassion for the people around her, make her a prime candidate for any promotion. While watching her work for the last three years, I have learned how to become a better teacher, colleague, and mentor from her example.

As a professor, Jessica demands excellence from her students and settles for nothing less. I have observed her teaching and how she interacts with students outside of class, and both of these interactions demonstrate her ability to exact the most from students who often give their best only reluctantly. In the Spring of 2015, I took a class from Jessica as we were working on the musical *Hands on a Hardbody*. She supervised every single aspect of that production from the costumes to the projections, yet she gave us great leeway in designing a variety of aspects of the show. She would not accept excuses from the students; rather, she coaxed our ideas for the musical into fruition.

My office was across the hall from Jessica’s and I routinely saw her mentoring and advising students; they came to her specifically because they knew she genuinely cared about them as students and as people, but that she still expected them to put forward their best efforts. Now that her office has moved to the theater, I see her less in that environment, but I still hear her students talk about her with an incredible degree of awe and reverence. They want her to be proud of them. Frankly, they want to emulate her—and they should because she has the rare combination of both an intellectual brilliance and an indefatigable work ethic. I have no idea how she gets all of the projects she takes on done; I don’t think the woman ever sleeps!

Whether it be a student who experiences difficulties or a colleague who needs assistance, Jessica always tries to help. Sometimes when I leave work at night, she is still in the theater, crafting her latest directorial masterpiece, I think she takes on too many responsibilities; she simply thinks they are part of her job—that someone has to do them, and ultimately, she is right. She delegates as well as anyone I have worked with, but sometimes things just fall through the cracks. Jessica takes care of those things too.

In these recommendation letters, I always try to include something negative that the candidate needs to work on. In Jessica’s case, I might suggest that she resist the urge to shepherd a fledgling playwright’s material through the workshopping process. Playwrights are a fickle, moody, and cantankerous lot; they have fragile egos and an even more tenuous grip on reality. An experienced dramaturg, Jessica has nevertheless taken on an original musical adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* called *Marshall County Line*, this semester. I would venture to say that there are not three community colleges in the country who might attempt this undertaking. Jessie will not be deterred. As in the other productions I have worked on with Jessica, her meticulous attention to detail and her unfailing energy inspire her students, her colleagues, and the community member participants into imagining that they actually have theatrical skill to pull such a weighty undertaking off. And we might do it yet!

I can think of no one at SUNY Sullivan who deserves this promotion more than Jessica Lopez-Barkl. For all the exhausting work she does for this college, she needs to be rewarded with an Associate Professorship. Please give her candidacy your full consideration.

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