



January 18, 2024

Dear Dr. Robert Kane and Others Whom it May Concern,

This letter serves to voice enthusiastic support for the promotion of Dr. Cyndi Rickards to Teaching Professor. Her deep commitment to rigorous and engaged pedagogy and unparalleled investment in student success, both in the Criminology and Justice Studies Department and throughout Drexel University, make clear her merit for this advancement. In this letter, I aim to further strengthen assessments of her merit for promotion by sharing how Dr. Rickards was instrumental in forging my most fruitful research-community partnership.

Since I joined Drexel in 2019 as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Dr. Rickards and I connected over our mutual dedication to reducing harms correlated with the criminal justice system through means of community engaged teaching and scholarship. She supported my independent scholarly development in this space by connecting me with her extensive network of community organizations and advocates throughout Philadelphia that would be supportive of collaborative and participatory research. Most notably, she facilitated the formation of a research-community partnership between myself and New Leash on Life USA, a local organization that leverages the human-animal bond to save lives (human and dog) and reduce recidivism. Dr. Rickards connected me with Mr. Robert Rosa, the Senior Vice President of Programs at New Leash, whom she knew through her work in prison education and reform. Initial conversations developed into more extensive planning conversations for collaborative research projects that would provide New Leash with the necessary data to advance their mission and fulfill my goals for engaged scholarship with local impact.

Due to Dr. Rickards' connections and introductions, I have been partnered with New Leash for over three years in what has become a productive, fruitful, and rewarding partnership for myself, the Criminology and Justice Studies Department, and Drexel University. I have received over \$70,000 in funding to complete two research projects with New Leash to date, with an additional \$70,000 in support pending this upcoming year. These projects involve direct data collection with program participants and collaboration with city government agencies (the [Office of the District Attorney](#), the Defender Association of Philadelphia), including those currently incarcerated, exemplifying the goals of civic engagement in research endeavors. The CJS Society – the student group of our department – has ran events to raise awareness and support for New Leash's mission. Finally, Mr. Rosa and I co-presented at an Accepted Students' Day recruitment event to share our partnership with prospective CJS majors and their families. This event was well-received as demonstrated by follow-up questions and conversations that made clear how Mr. Rosa's lived experience of incarceration and my approach to engaged and impactful scholarship resonated with attendees. In addition to these benefits for my research productivity, this partnership has harnessed the reputation of Drexel to elevate the profile of Mr. Rosa and New Leash – an outcome of mutual benefit that aligns with best practices in engaged (not exploitative) partnerships between academics and communities.

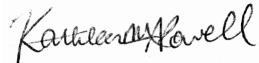
In addition to forging this partnership, Dr. Rickards has been an outstanding mentor to my development as an educator and researcher. She has been selfless in sharing her time, expertise, and networks to support my research goals in my current position. Dr. Rickards has provided immensely helpful guidance for navigating the tricky power dynamics of research-community partnerships. Finally, her expertise in teaching has inspired me to become a better educator. I have attended trainings and professional development opportunities – some of them facilitated by Dr. Rickards herself – to learn how to be a more engaged professor, particularly in community settings, that I look forward to implementing in later career

Kathleen Powell, PhD

stages. This mentorship was not a requirement of her role. It speaks to the broad value she adds to the learning communities of which she is a part – and I will forever be grateful for the immeasurable impact she has had on my professional development.

In all, Dr. Rickards' impact on the Drexel community is far more than just her stellar record as an educator. She exemplifies achievement of Drexel's mission of civic engagement in her facilitation of a research-community partnership on my behalf, and of her service to the community through her mentorship. Unlike other "engaged" scholars that more superficially and performatively connect with the communities around them, Dr. Rickards ensures that her engaged work is mutually beneficial to all involved. She is an outstanding candidate for career promotion in recognition of her numerous achievements in advancing all aspects of work at Drexel University. I hope this letter provided further evidence of her credentials for the role of Teaching Professor that may not be immediately apparent in her materials, but have been instrumental for advancing scholarship in ways that align with her core values of community engagement and social justice.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathleen Powell".

Kathleen Powell, Ph.D.

Assistant Research Professor

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