

DREXEL UNIVERSITY

3141 Chestnut Street ♦ Philadelphia, Pennsylvania ♦ 19104

May 7, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great pleasure that I submit this letter of nomination for Cyndi Rickards for the *Lynton Award for the Scholarship of Engagement for Early Career Faculty*. I have had the pleasure of working with Cyndi since she was hired as an Assistant Teaching Professor of Criminology & Justice Studies in the College of Arts & Sciences at Drexel University. I also have the current honor of working with Cyndi as her dissertation advisor. Cyndi's dissertation research truly connects to her teaching and service to community engagement as well as closely connects her role as the Coordinator of Community Outreach for Drexel University to Philadelphia.

I am nominating Cyndi for the *Lynton Award* because her work and research embody and exemplify the criteria for this prestigious award. In 2012 Cyndi designed and implemented the Side-By-Side community-based learning format at Drexel University. This innovative and unique pedagogical approach to community-engaged teaching addresses social inequalities and issues of injustice by bringing together traditional Drexel undergraduate students and community students from neighboring West Philadelphia who are often disenfranchised, as equal participants in a collaborative full-term postsecondary course experience. The Side-By-Side course format acknowledges that students, the community, and the University offer unique perspectives, knowledge, and experiences. Therefore, the Side-by-Side course format creates a space for learning with students who otherwise may not have an opportunity to learn together. Through creative activities and high impact practices, the Side-by-Side course format fosters community engagement through dialogue, collaboration, and experiential learning; concurrently challenging both faculty and students to address real-life social justice issues that exist within a diverse democracy.

Since implementing the Side-by-Side format at Drexel University, Cyndi has presented locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally on the pedagogical underpinnings and the conceptual framework that support this innovative and highly interactive approach to community engagement. Cyndi's mixed methods dissertation on the Side-by-Side format will conclude this fall. With numerous universities already reaching out to Cindy about replicating the Side-by-Side course format, Cyndi's research, teaching, and service will support future community-engagement across the United States.

I would like to conclude my nomination with a short video clip for the Awards Committee to watch. The video provides a testimonial from a West Philadelphia community member who reflects on her experience taking a class for the first time with Drexel students and her concept for developing a "People First Blog" as a class assignment. She shares in the video "Since I have been taking this class I have learned that we are all equal." She goes on to state "Society has separated people, classes, genders lifestyles, and religions.... but no matter what we are *all people first*." The student's reflection of her educational experience through this community partnership demonstrates the critical link between community-engaged practice and transformational learning. "People First Blog" Testimonial Video: <https://youtu.be/aD8GC22NsLs>

If you have any questions, contact me by email at kbetts@drexel.edu or by phone 912-257-8336.

Sincerely,



Kristen Betts, Ed.D., Clinical Professor
Ed.D. Program in Educational Leadership & Management
School of Education

May 12, 2015

Dear Nominating Committee,

I am writing to enthusiastically support the nomination of Professor Cyndi Rickards for the Lynton Award for the Scholarship of Engagement. I have known Cyndi for three years, primarily in the capacity of Director of the former Criminal Justice Program, and now as Head of the Department of Criminology and Justice Studies. I can think of no better-qualified person at the university to receive this award.

As Department Head, I have a great deal of personal experience with Cyndi's innovative teaching because she has brought so many of her great ideas to my attention. It was Cyndi, for example, who developed our two community-based learning courses (when CBLs were still rare); and she's done such a great job with both of them that during our curriculum revisions last year, I made the two courses a requirement in the core curriculum. Since then, Cyndi has developed several side-by-side courses, bringing members of the local community into her classes as both students and research partners for different activities. I had the pleasure of giving a guest lecture in one of her side-by-side courses and was amazed by the degree of participation among the community members and the ease with which they talked with Cyndi and the Drexel students about the very serious issues of race, justice, and inequality that characterize their daily lives. This is a salient point to make: Cyndi not only develops innovative and meaningful side-by-side courses, she executes them very well. I do not know many faculty members who could pair Drexel students with community partners, and then so adroitly navigate the difficult issues of structural inequalities. This takes a type of talent, again, that few of us enjoy.

Cyndi's community engagement work has changed the culture of our department because even the tenured and tenure-track faculty members now ask how they might develop teaching and research programs that integrate community-based learning. Interestingly, one of our tenure-track faculty members is working with Cyndi on a research project designed to link non-traditional student success metrics to side-by-side learning – a clear example of how her innovative teaching style also maps to her research agenda. Hyperbole aside, Cyndi has single-handedly, and quite literally, institutionalized community engagement both in the Department of Criminology and Justice Studies (by creating such great side-by-side courses that two are now required for all our students), and in the College of Arts and Sciences. She has “normalized” a type of teaching and scholarship that used to be virtually unheard of, which is the very definition of a successful innovation.

Again, I offer my earnest support of Cyndi's nomination.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Kane

Robert J. Kane, Ph.D.
Professor and Department Head
Criminology and Justice Studies



DREXEL UNIVERSITY

College of

Arts and Sciences

Biodiversity, Earth & Environmental Science

11 May 2015

To Whom It May Concern,

It is a great honor to add my voice in support of the nomination of Cyndi Rickards for the Lynton Award for the Scholarship of Engagement for Early Career Faculty. I am a relatively new faculty member at Drexel University, although I have been involved with research and informal science education for my entire career. Since joining the Drexel faculty Cyndi has been a mentor and driver of my own interests in community engagement.

My first contact with Cyndi was in a workshop that she co-led at Drexel on Community Based Learning. During the workshop, a group of professors were led through career-changing exercises that demonstrated the power of CBL pedagogy. Cyndi's enthusiasm and knowledge were key elements of the success of the workshop, and it was clear that she passionately embraces the values of community engagement.

Subsequently, Cyndi helped me bring a Special Topics course using community based learning pedagogy to reality. Not only did she encourage me, she stepped in to make sure that appropriate students got involved, she introduced me to like-minded colleagues, and she made sure that appropriate administrators saw the power of such a course for the students. Cyndi has selflessly taken that kind of leadership role at Drexel with respect to the University's engagement with the community in meaningful ways. I've realized that she is aware of all of the moving parts that play into the success of such programs, and she deftly makes sure that things go as smoothly as possible.

I can attest to the significant impact that Cyndi's community engagement skills have had on building my actions and attitudes toward engagement. I've seen the impact on other staff and students at Drexel as well. I see her as the quintessential professor and mentor for community engagement within the University, and thus I think she is an ideal nominee for the Lynton Award.

Sincerely,

Dr. Edward B. Daeschler

Vice-President for Collections, Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University
Associate Professor of Biodiversity, Earth and Environmental Sciences



Susan L. Brooks

*Associate Dean for Experiential Learning
Professor of Law*

May 14, 2015

Dear Lynton Award Review Committee,

I am delighted to write to you in support of the nomination of my wonderful colleague, Cyndi Rickards, for this most esteemed award. From what I know of her work, Cyndi is most deserving of this tremendous honor. She embodies all of the professional and personal qualities as well as the demonstrated passion and commitment to community engagement this award represents.

Please allow me a brief digression to explain my own role at Drexel University. Since the founding of the university's law school in 2006, I have been the Associate Dean for Experiential Learning and I am also a Professor of Law. As an Associate Dean, I am responsible for creating and overseeing all of the experiential and public service components of the upper level curriculum. My role thus has a heavy emphasis on community engagement, and I work collaboratively with faculty from many other departments of the university who have similar roles and interests.

Cyndi and I became acquainted in 2013, when both of us participated in the university's early visioning and planning process for the Dornsife Center for Community Partnerships, a Drexel-wide initiative located at the intersection of two dramatically underserved neighborhoods in West Philadelphia. I recall instantly being highly impressed with Cyndi's positive energy and her strong determination to help shape the Center as an authentic partnership with neighborhood members. Throughout the visioning and planning process, Cyndi was a leading voice and a constant reminder of our community engagement mission. Today, the Center has been established and is becoming a national model of civic engagement.

My other significant experience with Cyndi, which was equally if not more impressive, was last summer when she organized and led a truly transformative workshop I participated in on community-based learning. When I say this workshop was truly transformative, I do not use that term lightly. As someone who has been in law teaching for over twenty years, I would even go as far as to say that this week-long experience was life-changing in many ways. During the workshop, Cyndi brought in and exposed us to experts in many forms and aspects of community-based teaching and learning. Perhaps most influential among them, she arranged for us to spend a day experiencing community-based learning first-hand through a group of remarkable teachers who happen to be men incarcerated at a state prison. It would be impossible to put into words the depth and breadth of the learning that took place during our visit to the prison. Cyndi deserves huge credit for her vision, creativity, and initiative, as well as the great thoughtfulness, caring, and compassion she demonstrated in organizing that session and the entire workshop.

In sum, I believe she is an outstanding candidate for this award.

Sincerely,

Susan L. Brooks



DREXEL UNIVERSITY

College of

Arts and Sciences

Department of Anthropology

May 7, 2015

Ms. Jennifer Johnson Kebea,
Interim Director
Lindy Center for Civic Engagement

Dear Jennifer:

I am delighted to hear that Cyndi Rickards is being considered for a *Lynton Award for the Scholarship of Engagement for Early Career Faculty*. I cannot think of anyone at this institution more deserving of such recognition.

Cyndi was hired during the time I was head of the Department of Culture and Communication. We hired her as a teaching faculty member for the Criminology program. Cyndi has been a great addition to that program ever since.

Since she came here, however, Cyndi has been a phenomenal force reinvigorating our faculty – and me – in civic engagement. She introduced us to the Temple Program Inside-Out; organized a faculty introduction to it, which had a large turn-out; and arranged the week-long training for faculty, students, and staff to participate in the Curran Fromhold Correctional Facility on State Road. I myself was part of that training, as was one of my doctoral students in communication. I have since taught several times in the facility under this program.

It was not enough, however, for Cyndi to bring us this program and to shepherd us through it. She also expanded it, introducing a Side-by-Side component, which applies the same protocols outside correctional institutions to neighborhood organizations. My doctoral student has taught a Side-by-Side class several times now. When I attended Cyndi's Side-by-Side class in the neighborhood, I was blown away by the power of it and the dynamic learning experience Cyndi had put together.

From there, Cyndi has gone on to serve civic engagement at the college and university levels. She has been a phenomenon, tirelessly working – and working effectively – to change the culture of this institution in a civic direction. She certainly deserves the recognition of an award.

Sincerely,

Douglas V. Porpora, Ph.D.
Professor of Sociology



May 12, 2015

Members of the New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE),

It is with sincere gratitude that I write this letter of support for my colleague Cyndi Rickards asking she be considered for the Lynton Award for the Scholarship of Engagement for Early Career Faculty. In my 15+ years of teaching I have not met another individual who so successfully and so passionately weaves community engagement into her teaching, research, and service.

Our President, John Fry, has set a firm University goal of Drexel students becoming the most civically engaged in the nation. Cyndi has taken this goal and run with it. Her dedication and measureable results have led to her being appointed the Coordinator for Community Outreach for the College of Arts and Sciences. Her reach goes beyond our college though, she is truly setting the standard for our University when it comes to establishing and growing a robust community based learning program. What Cyndi started with a handful of classes she has skyrocketed to our fastest growing and (considered by many students and faculty alike) our most rewarding effort on campus. Quotes from students involved in the numerous community based learning classes give a glimpse at the world she has opened for us:

"Through this course I was able to travel outside of my comfort zone physically and mentally"... "The opportunities offered in community-based learning at Drexel were the most rewarding and significant aspects of my education"... "I can't put into words how amazing this course was and how it affected my life as a whole"

Cyndi is very much the hub of a growing movement on campus which is breathing new life into our faculty and administration. She facilitates and inspires our faculty while making us aware of the gaps in social justice surrounding us. She leads us to ways we can become part of the solution in our own manner. She is a liaison between numerous entities on and off campus, and truly is the driving force behind getting the best out of faculty and delivering that to our students.

Cyndi is a pleasure to work with and a true champion of the scholarship of engagement. The ripple effect from her efforts on campus is palpable throughout the campus and extends to our Philadelphia neighborhoods and beyond. She makes us all aware of the world around us and organizes and inspires us to get involved in our own way. She makes us all better versions of ourselves.

Best Regards,

Monica M. Togna, PhD
CoAS STEM Coordinator
Assistant Teaching Professor of Biology
Drexel University
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May 12, 2015

To whom it may concern,

I have the privilege of speaking on behalf of Cyndi Rickards for the *Lynton Award for the Scholarship of Engagement for Early Career Faculty*. Inclusiveness, collaboration, and problem-oriented work are certainly values which characterize Cyndi's work. As a faculty member at Drexel University, Cyndi collaborates with the Lindy Center for Civic Engagement as the faculty liaison. Her role is to coach, guide and resource faculty as they prepare community-based learning courses. Within her own discipline of Criminology & Justice Studies, Cyndi incorporates community-based learning into her courses as well as assisting with the Side-by-Side courses which are grounded in the notion of inclusive and reciprocal learning.

This winter, Cyndi approached me to serve on her dissertation committee and it's been sheer pleasure to observe her tease out nuances of inquiry in her dissertation research. Cyndi's dissertation research will examine the efficacy of 21st Century skill acquisition for participants in side-by-side courses. Side-by-side courses at Drexel are a unique and innovative approach to learning which a course consists of students and community members who learn course content side-by-side. This approach is an adaption from the *Inside Out* program which offers courses to the incarcerated along with students from a local university. She will draw on four modules from the National Student Survey of Engagement (NSSE) survey to measure the acquisition of 21st-century skills in four topical modules: (1) experiences with diverse populations, (2) transferable skills, (3) civic engagement, and (4) global perspectives. By examining the efficacy of learning in this innovative type of course, her research will both contribute to the evolving knowledge as well as enhance community-engaged practice. This fascinating study will certainly also become a platform for additional research.

Her keen interest in guiding and supporting others at Drexel has deepened community engagement among faculty in a brief time. As a young scholar and faculty member, Cyndi is quickly carving a place in the field of the scholarship of engagement as both teacher, researcher and practitioner.

Most sincerely,

Char Gray, PhD
Executive Director, PA Campus Compact
28 S. Dewberry Street, Box 8
Harrisburg, PA 17101



LIFT-Philadelphia

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May 7, 2015

Dear Lynton Awards Committee,

I cannot imagine anyone more worthy of the Lynton Award for the Scholarship of Engagement for Early Career Faculty than Cyndi Rickards. Besides being a mentor, partner, and role model, Cyndi Rickards is someone whose contributions, even relatively early in her career, are what any community builder would aspire to accomplish in a lifetime.

Cyndi has provided not only the foundation but also the bricks and the mortar that has afforded countless students with the opportunity to engage meaningfully with their broader community. In her role at Drexel, Cyndi has enthusiastically supported my organization, LIFT, as our relationship with the university continues to grow and thrive. To provide context, LIFT works one-on-one with low-income community members to help them set and achieve goals in employment, housing, and income/family supports. When I met Cyndi more than six years ago, she embraced LIFT's antipoverty model as an opportunity for her students to experience the joys as well as the challenges inherent in our work with our clients. From the very beginning as the course professor, Cyndi was passionate about having her students participate fully in LIFT's work with our members, and I observed immediately how strongly she believed in the power of community-based learning as a way to inculcate in all of us a drive toward real community engagement.

Cyndi lives and breathes her commitment to social justice through community engagement. She has unabashedly blazed the trail in spearheading Drexel's collaboration with organizations like LIFT, putting in the time and energy to craft the right environment and bring together the right resources for her students to engage deeply in community-based work. At the same time, she has remained keenly aware of the dynamics of university/community partnerships and goes above and beyond to ensure balance in the relationship. Cyndi has established herself as a driving force behind Drexel's community engagement efforts and its reputation as a trusted and worthy partner with nonprofit organizations like LIFT. Most impressive to me is that she does this not for personal accolades, but because she so passionately believes in this work. She is tireless in her commitment to sharing her knowledge and expertise so that others can learn from her experience, both on the partner side as well as with faculty, and every one of my colleagues in the nonprofit sector who knows Cyndi and has seen the results of her work understands her tremendous contributions and value. She is the reason why so many organizations like mine have such fruitful relationships with Drexel students and faculty.

Another example: by sheer force of will, coupled with wonderful savvy, humor, ingenuity, and courage, Cyndi created an innovative program that brought community members and Drexel students together in a new and powerful way. The concept, dubbed Side-by-Side, created an opportunity for Drexel students and community members to learn and study together and grapple with complex issues as peers. I saw this program development first-hand, as the first class took place at LIFT, with LIFT's clients making up the community member component alongside traditionally enrolled Drexel students. As the professor, Cyndi was masterful in her ability to help students dig deep into their assumptions, challenge each other, and be daring in their ideas, all while creating an environment of mutual trust, respect, and understanding. Despite their real and perceived differences, students not only embraced the course topic, but they experienced their fellow students in completely new and critically important ways. After this success in the community classroom, Cyndi could have kept this model to herself, but instead she built out a structure, as well as a training and teaching methodology, that she has shared with others. Again, she was indefatigable in her efforts to bring this opportunity to more students, more faculty, and more community members, all in the name of increasing understanding, building community engagement, and highlighting critical challenges to be tackled in the name of social justice.

Over the course of my career, I have met very few people, if any, with a combined sense of commitment, quality of character, genuine humility, and passion for engagement equaling that of Cyndi Rickards. Cyndi is extraordinary, and in my view, sets the standard by which teachers and community builders should be measured. She has my complete and full-voiced support for this prestigious award.

Most sincerely,

Josh Romalis

Executive Director, LIFT-Philadelphia



**Department of Criminal Justice
College of Liberal Arts**

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May 12, 2015

Re: 2015 Ernest A. Lynton Award for the Scholarship of Engagement for Early Career Faculty

Dear Award Committee,

It is a great honor to nominate Cyndi Rickards for this year's Ernest A. Lynton Award for the Scholarship of Engagement for Early Career Faculty. Cyndi has been part of The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program since 2011, when she completed the program's weeklong, intensive Training Institute. Since then, she has proven to be a remarkable ally to our program with her engaged teaching, her steadfast administrative support, her vision and innovation for the program's growth, and her commitment to students and colleagues as that vision becomes institutional reality.

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program began in 1997 as a semester-long Criminal Justice course at Temple University. It was held in the Philadelphia Prison System with campus-based students from Temple and incarcerated students from the jail. Since then, the program has expanded to include a network of 565 trained instructors from hundreds of colleges and universities around the world, committed to bringing incarcerated and non-incarcerated people together for engaged and informed dialogue that allows for transformative learning experiences and invites participants to take leadership in addressing crime, justice, and other issues of social concern. Cyndi is a trained Inside-Out instructor, and one who stands out among her peers in terms of her commitment.

Not only has Cyndi taught multiple semesters of Inside-Out courses in the Philadelphia Prison System (PPS), she has served as the much-needed administrative liaison between The Inside-Out Center (the administrative nucleus of The Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program) and her colleagues at Drexel who are also trained Inside-Out instructors. Her commitment to this engaged pedagogy is evident in the often thankless administrative coordination that has now institutionalized the program at Drexel: Inside-Out courses are now required for all Criminal Justice undergraduate majors, and The Inside-Out Center has dedicated a PPS facility (one of five) to all Drexel Inside-Out courses. Cyndi has been instrumental to this systematic growth of our program in the Philadelphia area.

Yet she has not stopped there. Cyndi's passion for community engaged learning has prompted her to co-design (along with colleague Jennifer Johnson) a Community-Based Learning (CBL) training for interested colleagues at Drexel. Seeing opportunity for more collaboration with the external community, she invited The Inside-Out Center's team of incarcerated and non-incarcerated facilitators/trainers to help lead this CBL training. This work has expanded the vision of Inside-Out pedagogy to settings outside of carceral contexts. Cyndi's tireless commitment, hard work, and vision for democratically engaged education make her an extraordinary candidate for the Lynton Award; she is an exemplary teacher-scholar-citizen deserving of this high recognition.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lori Pompa'.

Lori Pompa
Founder and Executive Director
lori.pompa@insideoutcenter.org

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patricia A. Way'.

Patricia A. Way
Associate Director
tricia.way@insideoutcenter.org

Alyssa Scott
3141 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

May 11, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing on behalf of Cynthia Rickards regarding the Dr. Ernest A. Lynton Award. As a Criminology and Justice Policy major at Drexel University, I have been a student of hers for the past two years. In this time I have gotten to know Mrs. Rickards on a human level that transcends a typical professor-student relationship.

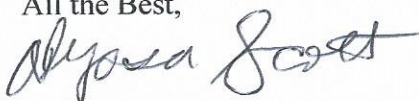
Professor Rickards is involved in every aspect of each student's learning experience. Her positive attitude and inclusive teaching style create an environment for everyone to learn and contribute equally. This is especially true in our Inside-Out course, where she gives every student's opinion equal weight no matter who they are: incarcerated or non-incarcerated. Using these mechanisms, she constantly fosters intellectually stimulating conversations about community engagement and social justice; two subjects she has deeply rooted passions for.

Professor Rickards's commitment to equality leads her to work actively in the community to reduce the income inequality gap. One of my major requirements was to take a community-based learning course where I would spend fifty-percent of my time in the classroom and fifty-percent of my time at a local non-profit organization. This interactive opportunity gave me direct access and proximity to the issues we often discussed in lecture. I learned more working one-on-one with community members as they shared their life experiences with me than I ever could have in a traditionally run course.

Not only is Professor Rickards an energetic educator, she is also a compassionate human being with a vested interest in her students' all around well-being. She has supported me through the most trying moments of my college experience thus far, and I firmly believe she will continue to be a voice of wisdom through the rest of my academic career. My first glimpse of her compassion occurred when I had an asthma attack during class. In addition to waiting with me until the ambulance came, she also rode with me to the hospital and stayed by my side until I could be seen. Her dedication to the overall welfare and success of her students can be described as nothing less than inspirational.

Though many of my peers think Professor Rickards is hard on us, I believe she challenges us to push our limits because she knows what tools we need to succeed. Professor Rickards continually encourages me to be my best self, and I am thankful every day that I have been fortunate enough to have such a motivated mentor.

All the Best,



Alyssa Scott