

February 8, 2024

To Whom it May Concern:

It is my pleasure to write a letter in support of Dr. Cynthia Richards in her promotion to Full Teaching Professor. I first met Dr. Rickards in class where she taught me for two consecutive terms in the Summer and Fall of 2023: Honors 305 *Inside and Out of Our Jails*, and HNRS T380 *Project Just(ice) Cities*, respectively.

The *Inside and Out of Our Jails* course took place over Zoom where half of the class were “inside students” — incarcerated males at the Bucks County Jail. Even amidst the impersonal and dissociative nature of Zoom, Dr. Rickards forged a meaningful sense of unity within the class and encouraged the expression of *all* voices. Although we were all taking the class in our respective spaces, Dr. Rickards imbued the digital space with a powerful sense of community and connection. By the end of the course, I felt a deep attachment to each and every one of the “inside students” as well as my Drexel classmates. By far, this class was both academically and emotionally rewarding for me, and it continues to rank as my favorite classes taken at Drexel University.

As a professor, Dr. Cynthia Rickards is a dynamic instructor, using didactic mediums to convey concepts and social theories of inequality and restorative justice. As a Black female, Dr. Rickards continually exhibits a high level of racial consciousness and social awareness which enriches the entire class. Throughout her classes, I feel acknowledged and empowered; having had the privilege of being Dr. Rickard’s student, I can attest to her exceptional qualities as an educator, mentor, and compassionate individual.

As a person, Dr. Cynthia Rickards is honest, kind, and empathetic. Beyond her role as an educator, Dr. Rickards possesses an unparalleled ability to connect with her students in a way that exemplifies the ethos of a mentor who is invested in the holistic growth and success of her students. During the Fall quarter, I learned that my grandmother had suffered a stroke and was in recovery. During that arduous time, I missed a couple of Dr. Rickard’s classes. In fear of my grade and performance in an honors class, I scheduled a meeting to express my concerns. I was quite nervous and filled with worry; yet, Dr. Rickards demonstrated such empathy and grace towards me. In that moment, I felt so comforted and cared for; she assured me of my good standing in the course and offered continued support. In my experience at Drexel, it is rare that you have a professor who is deeply invested in a student's personal wellbeing and emotional health. After our meeting, and for the remainder of the term, Dr. Rickards would check-in on me, sending my family and I well wishes and encouragement. Her support has resonated with me in a way that I had not experienced and will always be remembered.

In many ways, Dr. Rickards reminds me of my mother – a full tenured professor at William Paterson University. My mother, Dr. Darlene Russell, has not only instructed, but also mentored many students over the years. My mother is a Fulbright Grant Awardee and author of several books; she never ceases to ensure the growth of her students through the efficacy and mindfulness of her teaching. I see my mother in Dr. Rickards: Dr. Rickards has had an important influence on my academic journey, inspiring me to excel in my field of study and future career. Dr. Rickards has enhanced my sense of belonging by fostering an inclusive learning community across her courses. Ultimately, Dr. Rickards has had a positive impact on my career as a student and continues to show her support as I pursue my career in medicine. I will never forget what Dr. Rickards said to me in the final days of my class with her: “Please keep me posted on all the good you do in the world” (12/10/2023).

Dr. Rickard’s presence at Drexel is a significant contribution to the academic community in and of itself. I wholeheartedly support her promotion and have no doubts that she will continue to inspire and empower students for years to come. It is with great enthusiasm that I recommend Dr. Cynthia Rickards for promotion.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or require additional information. I can be reached at ncr47@drexel.edu.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Nalo Russell', written over a horizontal line.

Nalo Russell
Class of 2024
Pennoni Honors College

To the Committee,

I, Emily Greberman, would highly recommend Dr. Cyndi Rickards for full professor and will speak on the impact she has had on me and the trajectory of my academic career. I came to Drexel fall of 2017 and had the pleasure of taking Dr. Rickards's classes throughout undergrad and then later became her Teaching Assistant for several quarters thereafter.

One enters their freshman year at Drexel and is met with Community Based Classes, not only does Dr. Rickards go above and beyond by educating them on how to conduct themselves within the community and various settings, but she also makes these topics, conversations, and experiences approachable, digestible, and not to mention enjoyable. Many people say that a good teacher is someone who evokes emotion through subject matter, and I believe Dr. Rickards not only encourages that from her students but also facilitates a space where that is okay- it is okay to feel. Entering a jail for the first time can be scary, intimidating, emotional, and intense. Her approach to classroom facilitation demonstrates an acceptance of the field and a willingness to lean into the depth of criminology's topics.

While the Inside Out program is revolutionary to the idea of "classrooms," I believe it is predominately this way because of Dr. Rickards. Her efforts to build relationships with community members, other departments, and students form a unique community that extends beyond Drexel. Specifically, if it wasn't for Prison, Society, and You, I likely would never have found a passion for prison reform and carceral research. I remember during that class I loved the idea of writing reflections at the end of each week. It was also through that class that I got to know and befriend men who were incarcerated and became inspired by their words. It was in that class that I asked Dr. Rickards if I could make a blog where I could post their writings, art, and poetry. I am still thankful for her openness and willingness to allow me to create a project like that without having done it before. She encourages her students to be creative, critical, and skeptical – all in the best ways. I called this project the Barcode Boys. Little did I know it was the start of my qualitative research journey.

It has been 3 years since I graduated from Drexel and in that time, I have completed my MS in Criminology and am now in the second year of my PhD program in Criminal Justice at Rutgers University. Hopefully this summer I will be the instructor for my own class. In preparation, I know that there are many principles I will take with me that I learned from Dr. Rickards:

1. Be honest and upfront about class expectations.
2. Check in with your students and communicate with them well.
3. Be open to new experiences and new people. Connection is our biggest strength.

With all of that being said, I believe the Drexel Criminology Department would be lucky to have Dr. Rickards as a full professor. She is a wonderfully passionate teacher, advocate, and community leader.

Buzurgmehr Hojiev
621 Lawler Street
(267)-405-0844

To whom it may concern,

I have been studying under Professor Cynthia Rickards for more than two years across multiple courses. Throughout all this time, Professor Rickards was an incredible educator whose courses and teaching style pushed me to my limits and helped me grasp varied important relevant issues to their fullest extent. The professor's ability to structure classes in a way that made them stand out always made them a joy to attend. She was always forthcoming, and able to make the most complex ideas easier to grasp and discuss.

For example, during the "Police, Theory, and Practice" class, the professor had us visit Drexel Police and get the perspectives of officers on each week's topic. After that, she would give us ample time to discuss and critique their responses in detail. The detailed readings of the subjects are crucial, but one of the greatest aspects of Professor Rickards's teaching experience is that she often showcases the readings in practice which provides a whole new perspective on these issues. In the "Places of Justice" class, she had us engage with "inside students", as she had us call the inmates in order not to dehumanize them. Her structuring of that class gave us so much freedom to interact and allowed us to get a first-hand account of conditions in prison. It is that creative teaching style that made the topics themselves unforgettable, as we approached them from so many angles.

The way the Professor taught us genuinely made an impact on my perspective and my outlook. As an anxiety-driven immigrant with very little faith in his ideals, she broadened my horizons immensely and helped me find my center. I will always be grateful to her for that.

Professor Cynthia Rickards is an exceptional tutor leader. Her ability to pierce through complex topics and help guide students to engage with the curriculum has always been incredibly impressive.

Sincerely,

X



Buzurgmehr Hojiev

Briana Leone
Philadelphia, PA 19145
January 20, 2024
267-635-3999

Dr. Robert Kane
Drexel University
Criminology & Justice Studies
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dear Dr. Robert Kane,

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support for promoting Dr. Cyndi Rickards to Professor within the Criminology & Justice Studies department at Drexel University. As a student who has had the privilege of being under Dr. Rickard's mentorship, I have witnessed firsthand the dedication, expertise, and passion that make her an outstanding candidate for the promotion.

Dr. Rickards has consistently demonstrated a commitment to academic excellence and a genuine concern for the success of her students. She possesses a deep knowledge of Criminology and its many facets, and can equally convey her passion for complex concepts in an accessible manner for the students she teaches. Dr. Rickards is an educator first and foremost, consistently ensuring she gives students the utmost respect. A pivotal feature of Dr. Rickard's teachings revolves around respect, for oneself, peers, and others. The way she interacts with students and maintains her professional relationship with them further prepares students to succeed in their academic and professional endeavors.

What sets Dr. Rickards apart in her work is her unwavering support for students both inside and outside the classroom. Dr. Rickards goes above and beyond to provide additional resources, mentorship, and guidance for her students, creating a lasting impact on their academic and personal development of her students. Throughout my academic studies and professional endeavors she has been a stellar mentor. Even now she continues to be a pillar of support for me, a post-graduate Drexel alumni, which demonstrates how much of a great mentor she is and the continued positive impact she has had on me as a student and a professional in the working environment. As a mentor, Dr. Rickards ensures her students have a place to go to for resources and support while also maintaining an understanding of her role as a professional figure in her students' lives.

Furthermore, Dr. Rickards continues to actively support civic engagement projects - like the Undergraduate Teaching Assistantships and the Inside Out courses - which provide students with concrete, hands-on experiences for them to apply what they learn beyond the classroom environment. I believe her research and academic activities positively contribute to the Department's reputation and academic standing within and outside the University.

In conclusion, it is with great enthusiasm that I wholeheartedly support Dr. Rickards for a promotion from Associate Professor to Professor. Her impact on students, dedication to academic excellence, and contributions to the department make her an exemplary candidate. I am confident that Dr. Rickards will continue to inspire and contribute significantly to the growth and success of our university.

Thank you for considering my recommendation.

Sincerely,
Briana Leone.

Abryana Kevelier-Williams

akk73@drexel.edu

ID: 14447149

February 2nd 2024

Dear Dr. Kane and members of the CJS Department,

I am writing to extend my recommendation for Dr. Rickards' promotion as a testament to her outstanding dedication, expertise, and contributions to the Department of Criminology and Justice Studies. As a student who has had the privilege of taking several courses under Dr. Rickards's guidance, I can attest to her commitment to students' learning and unwavering passion for advancing knowledge in our discipline, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Throughout my academic journey, Dr. Rickards has consistently demonstrated a remarkable ability to inspire and engage her students. In my first year, in one of the first CJS courses I had ever taken at Drexel, I vividly remember Dr. Rickards taking the time to ensure each student in the class was able to fully understand the software we were using (SimCity, I believe!) while keeping us engaged and excited about the software overall. Her enthusiasm for the class was contagious; even for students who started the term not fully invested in the class, by the end of the term, we would delight in every opportunity to share the status of our digital city with Dr. Rickards and the rest of the class. Dr. Rickards is also dedicated to continuing student enrichment outside of the classroom, and I say this from personal experience. At the end of our SimCity course, Dr. Rickards invited me, a first-year CJS student at the time, to present alongside her in the Engaged Scholarship Constiourim, where I was able to present my SimCity findings to other CJS scholars. This was one of the highlights of my year, as it is a rarity that first-year students can attend conferences of such high status. This truly speaks to Dr. Rickards's dedication to engaging students of all levels within the CJS field.

One of Dr. Rickard's most commendable qualities is her dedication to academic excellence. She consistently invests considerable time and effort into course preparation, is continuously checking in with students to develop innovative teaching strategies, and incorporates the latest research findings into her curriculum. Her commitment to staying current with advancements in the field ensures that her students receive a comprehensive and up-to-date education. It is no secret that Dr. Rickards is deeply invested in the success and well-being of her students. She is approachable, supportive, and always willing to provide guidance and mentorship both inside and outside the classroom. Her genuine concern for her student's academic and personal growth fosters a sense of trust and mutual respect that enhances the overall learning experience.

In conclusion, Dr. Rickards is an exceptional educator, scholar, and mentor who embodies the highest standards of academic excellence and integrity. Her passion for criminology and justice studies is palpable, and her dedication to her students' success is unwavering. I do not doubt that Dr. Rickards is not only deserving of promotion but also poised to continue making significant contributions to the CJS department in the years to come.

Please feel free to contact me if you require any further information or clarification regarding my recommendation.

Sincerely,
Abryana Kevelier-Williams

Amanda DiStefano, Intelligence Analyst III at Liberty Mid-Atlantic HIDTA
614 S. Central Blvd, Broomall, PA 19008 | 484-682-4533 | adistefano1229@gmail.com

January 23, 2024

Robert Kane
Department Head, Professor
Drexel University - Department of Criminology and Justice Studies
3401 Market Street, Room 110-F
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dear Rob,

It is my honor and privilege to recommend Cyndi Rickards for promotion from associate to full professor for the Department of Criminology and Justice Studies at Drexel University.

My name is Amanda DiStefano, current Intelligence Analyst III for Liberty Mid-Atlantic HIDTA. I am a member of the 2019 alumni of the program and had the pleasure of being taught and mentored by Cyndi for four years. Cyndi played a key role in my growth as a person, as well as aided in my academic success.

Cyndi is one of the most enthusiastic people in the criminology field. She facilitated a different learning experience which consistently allowed for new ways of thinking. I exited the program with an entirely different and more open mindset on crime and justice than when I began. I credit my openness to new ideas to Cyndi. The courses I took of Cyndi's changed my entire college experience and I have carried what I learned from her well beyond the classroom and into my career.

Not only was Cyndi a dedicated and innovative professor, but she was also a mentor and confidant. She was always there to talk to, and I was able to build a wonderful relationship with her during my time in the program. She helped shape part of who I am today. I am confident she will continue to do this with future students in the program.

Feel free to contact me at any time at 484-682-4533 or adistefano1229@gmail.com to discuss further. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Amanda DiStefano