January 3, 2009

Charles R. Bantz
Chancellor, IUPUI
Executive Vice President, Indiana University
355 N. Lansing Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202

Dear Dr. Bantz:

I am honored to join in support of Professor Ulla Connor's nomination for a Chancellor's Professorship at IUPUI. I am confident that Professor Connor's sterling record of scholarship--her programmatic intellectual leadership in the field of applied linguistics as well as her institutional contributions to her university--would earn her a place in the highest echelons of distinction at most leading universities in the U.S. Moreover, notwithstanding her stature as a senior scholar, Professor Connor continues to innovate. Her recent embrace of health literacy within the domain of the Intercultural Communication Center is a masterful stroke, and has rightfully attracted substantial external funding. Accordingly, I enthusiastically endorse Professor Connor's nomination for an IUPUI Chancellor's Professorship.

An excellent scholar is one who consistently produces thoughtful and informative research, but a *singular* scholar is one who conveys a compelling vision of a field of study to her disciplinary community. In 1987 and '88 Professor Connor issued a trifecta of publications that marked her as an individual with great promise of inscribing just such a compelling stamp on the discipline of applied linguistics and discourse studies. The publications to which I allude include an influential road map for research in second language writing ("Research Frontiers in Writing Analysis," fittingly selected for subsequent reprinting in *Landmark Essays on ESL Writing),* a book chapter that presented a model empirical study of cross-cultural differences in writing style ("Cross Cultural Variation in Argument," co-authored with Purdue's Janice Lauer), and a coedited volume that helped demonstrate the sheer empirical and theoretic weight that had been accumulating in the then emerging area of contrastive rhetoric *(Writing Across Languages: Analysis of L2 Text).* Prior to this set of publications, scholars of second language writing--especially those who were students of Robert Kaplan at USC (Connor was not)-had invoked Kaplan's notions of culture-specific rhetorical patterns in sporadic analyses of second language writing. But it was Professor Connor's concentrated efforts at this juncture in time which consolidated a critical mass of such scholarship, imposed far more rigorous scientific standards upon it, and catapulted it into the mainstream of applied linguistics. When I taught a graduate seminar on culture and written language in 1990, my students and I spent considerable time with the works by Ulla Connor to which I refer above. These works remain staples as well for my more recent students in applied linguistics.

Over the next eight years or so, Professor Connor herself was the leading contributor to the growing body of research in contrastive rhetoric, publishing much of it in the top venues for this area (e.g., *Research in the Teaching of English, TESOL Quarterly).* Then in 1996, Cambridge University Press published her watershed volume, *Contrastive Rhetoric: Cross-Cultural Aspects of Second Language Writing.* This book took a synoptic perspective on the research on culture and writing extant to that point. It framed what might be called the "standard theory" of cultural differences in textual realization of rhetorical patterns. Today, it is hardly possible to write credibly on that topic without acknowledging Professor Connor's book as a touchstone. That the book has been the target of attack by certain critics I

take as a mark of its stature. Professor Connor's estimable record of guest lectureships, visiting professorships, and invited articles-international as well as national--is surely testament to the fact that her "standard theory" of contrastive rhetoric has been the subject of many more numerous plaudits than attacks, however.

What I find especially remarkable--and what I proffer as one key indicia of Professor Connor's intellectual leadership--is that Professor Connor herself in more recent years has undertaken to critique and revise the standard version of contrastive rhetoric which she did so much to explicate. My guess is that she began to do so before the ink was even dry on her 1996 volume. Connor's reassessment attempts to take account of nonacademic genres of writing and of new writing technologies such as multimedia web page construction. In doing so, she moves the field of contrastive rhetoric more in alignment with the far more expansive arena of culture and communication. Professor Connor's revised views are explicated most cogently in the concluding essay of her 2008 co-edited book, *Contrastive Rhetoric: Reaching to Intercultural Rhetoric*. With this work, Professor Connor has seized the initiative to push forward the very frontiers that she herself had established.

Lest any reviewers of Professor Connor's career achievements mistakenly infer that contrastive rhetoric--the specific area of Connor's most programmatic contributions to date—is some sort of backwater of esoteric scholarly dalliance, I wish to explicitly assert its centrality to at least three related disciplines. (1) The education-oriented discipline of Teaching English as a Second Language draws heavily upon contrastive rhetoric and Professor Connor's work to help determine where the limits of purely linguistic instruction lie, and where instead instructors must switch to a more contextualized kind of teaching that asks students to compare and contrast cultural expectations for communication. (2) The discourse-based discipline of applied linguistics, in turn, draws methodologically upon Connor's contrastive rhetoric research for models of identifying distinctive text structures that "make a difference" in terms of cultural meaning. (3) The problem-solving social scientific discipline of intercultural communication studies draws upon Connor's research for potential techniques for overcoming cultural barriers to intergroup understanding. These are all disciplines that stand stage center in our increasingly multinational and multicultural interactions. The impact of Professor Connor's scholarship in contrastive rhetoric is thus as significant as the latest headlines about global trade, ethnic conflict, or the educational achievement of immigrant populations.

Were Professor Connor's contributions solely in the area of contrastive rhetoric, she would still be counted among the most productive and influential scholars in the discipline of Applied Linguistics. In the past 10 years, however--in addition to revising theories of contrastive rhetoric--she has also evolved a robust research program in corpus linguistics and the analysis of nonacademic genres of writing. While Connor's own empirical work has focused especially on analyses of fund-raising direct mail, this research thread is germane to a broad range of professional genres. (Witness Connor's two 2004 edited volumes on corpus linguistics and professional genres.) As a case in point, my own research on tobacco industry documents, funded by the National Cancer Institute, has utilized some of Professor Connor's research on fund-raising texts as a model for our study of corporate discourse.

Over the past two or three years Professor Connor has embarked on a logical extension of her work in corpus linguistics and applied linguistics to the field of health literacy. Health literacy, as you may know, is one of the cornerstones of public health policy in the U.S. Its centrality is affirmed in the Department of Health and Human Service's road map, *Healthy People 2010* (and even more so in the upcoming 2020 revision). Much of Connor's health literacy research to date has focused on the structure and usability of prescription drug information sheets—a matter of crucial importance in preventing medication errors, especially in our increasingly multilingual and aging population. I was

pleased to see that the Eli Lilly Foundation has seen fit to provide substantial financial support for this new thrust. Having read some of Professor Connor's most recent papers in health literacy, I myself was impressed by the conceptual direction she seem to be taking, specifically, away from the simplistic fixation on document readability that consumes much research on health literacy, and toward a more social-interactive and ecological notion of health information processing.

Based upon the excellence of her empirical and conceptual contributions to several domains of research, based upon the willingness she has manifested to revise and push the boundaries of her own work, based upon her keen sense of innovation in extrapolating her work to new horizons like health literacy, but especially based upon the programmatic scholarly vision that she has promulgated to an entire discipline, Ulla Connor has without doubt achieved singular distinction. To confer the designation Chancellor's Professor on Ulla Connor, then, would be to appropriately acknowledge the stature of her career achievements and contributions, as well as to honor the institution with which her name is so closely associated.

With best personal regards,

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