January 13, 2011

Chancellor's Award Selection Committee
Indiana University

Dear Selection Committee,

The purpose of this letter is to provide feedback about Dr. Robin L. Hughes' teaching, research, and service activities and skills. As a student who has not only attended a course taught by Professor Hughes, but has the privilege of serving as her researcher associate. I am honored to share my comments with the Chancellor's Award Selection Committee on her behalf.

I am currently a 3rd year doctoral student in the HESA program (Ph.D track). On campus, I currently serve as a research associate for Dr. Joshua Smith and the IU Center for Urban and Multicultural Education (CUME) and for the IU Community Learning Network's African American Male Equity Project (AAMEP) headed up by Vice Chancellor Murtadha and Professor Hughes. Off campus, I work as a project manager for the United Way of Central Indiana's Youth as Resources (YAR) where I manage grants given to youth groups to engage in service learning opportunities. My work on and office campus has afforded me the opportunity to work with Professor Hughes in several capacities; first being my experience with her as a teacher.

I met Professor Hughes when I took her Intro to Higher Education and Student Affairs course as a non-degree post-graduate student in the spring of 2008. I was slightly undecided about applying to join the IU Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) program, so took the course with the intention to judge whether or not to complete the application process. I had not formally met Professor Hughes before hand and was unsure as to what type of professor she would be; inspiring or discouraging. During the very first class I was a little taken back. Despite being the only doctoral student in the class, I also seemed to be the oldest. However, Professor Hughes introduced herself and really showed her age by opening with a song from the late 70's. I was immediately interested in what I could learn from her because she came across as being approachable despite her literary accomplishments. Here was an accomplished scholar that knew some of the pop culture that still thrives today. That day I learned that the becoming a professor does not mean I have to be "tight- lipped" and "stuff-necked" , and that because I come from a diverse background does not mean I can't incorporate some of that diversity in the classroom; Dr. Hughes was living proof!

During her class I learned that students come from varying types of backgrounds and face a multitude of issues in higher education and those issues can be brought to light and resolved by conducting research.

Unlike previous courses in higher education that guided me through the history of the sector, Professor Hughes' course revealed that conducting research as a higher education professional can have immeasurable impact on the institution and how it serves its students; which are becoming increasingly diverse as time goes on. I learned the benefits of using the Chronicle of Education to stay fresh on current and diverse trends in Higher Education. She showed how writing soap boxes and "op-ed" pieces can be fun all while learning a new skill.

My classmates and I built a relationship with one another based off our experiences in the class. We researched each others' backgrounds and highlighted different issues we might face based off our profiles. Students represented different races, religions, genders, and sexual orientations, which made for interesting conversations, research, and accomplishment of shared goals. Our emotions and bonds were tested when a fellow classmate committed suicide during the course. Professor Hughes was an integral part of our bond by halting her lesson to allow us to grieve and she had a Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) worker on hand to speak to those in the class that wanted to. And, still remembering that she is a professor, she encouraged us to find other instances in the Chronicle on Higher Education where campus suicides where the topic. Needless to say, we are all still good friends to this day, and I decided to join the HESA program based off my semester long observation of Professor Hughes. She not only exceeded my expectations as a professor, she showed how much she cared about her student's learning experiences and made sure they covered an array of topics, and she used every opportunity as a teaching moment. She has shown that same attention to diversity as a researcher as well.

In the spring of 2009 I started working with CUME as an hourly staff on a mix-methods project dealing with teen parenting support programs on the secondary education level. Before that time, I had several experiences with program development, assessment, and evaluation of student support programs housed at University College. During my work with CUME, Professor Hughes was also a researcher evaluating the Student African American Brotherhood (SAAB) program. As a result of the course I had with, I if I could assist her on the project. The very first task she assigned me with was to conduct an annotated bibliography on a group of authors she wanted to familiarize herself with. She took me through the process of turning theory into practice by having me use those annotated bibliographies to conduct a literature review. In addition, she had me conduct in-person interviews with SAAB staff and students over the course of several months and showed me how observer notes and comments are used to flush out themes when you are participating in action-research. It was a hands-on experience that I am grateful for. Professor Hughes showed me how to put what I was learning into practice to make a difference in higher education for all students, not just traditional ones. However it wasn't until I joined her research team as an associate for another project that I was witness to how her personal research actually makes a difference in higher education.

In the summer of 2009 I was approached by Professor Hughes in regards to a research associate position she had available with AAMEP. She had a chance to observe my developing skills as a researcher while working with CUME and my tenacity as a student and an emerging scholar. She appointed me as one of the team's qualitative research associates alongside herself. Working directly

with Dr. Hughes on her research interests was, and remains to be an eye opening experience. She has challenged me to abandon my tendencies to use “deficit model thinking” in my research and writing. She has encouraged me to present and publish to highly popular journals and conferences, as well as the not-so popular (which happened to contain a lot of minority focused journals). Despite the health problems she and her family faced, she has remained in the forefront regarding submitting and presenting at state and nation wide conferences on diversity and student issues. She has authored and co-authored several publications since 2009 on the state of the educated and uneducated minority. She has afforded me the opportunity to co-author a paper she successfully submitted the Journal of African American Males (JAAM); one of those not-so-popular journals we found during one of our many searches of journals to submit to.

What makes me in awe about this aspect of Professor Hughes is the fact that she chooses to remain stead-fast to her research interests despite the negative feelings associated with minority female professors and the personal issues she has faced over the past few years. Notwithstanding having a daughter diagnosed with cancer, Professor Hughes still managed to stay diverse in her teaching and on top of her research. She created an alternative office in the Union Building just to stay closer to her daughter while she was going through chemotherapy; all in an effort to continue to conduct research and write. There were many times she slept overnight on campus because she had a proposal or conference deadline to meet. In addition to dealing with an ailing child, focusing your research on minority student issues as a professor is not considered a noble path, as my research on the professoriate socialization process as lead me to believe. Yet it seems like every day Professor Hughes is submitting an article to Diversity Issues, writing an op-ed piece on Critical Race Theory or presenting at a conference on the success of African American males. This is because Professor Hughes recognizes she is an African American, and as such she has a duty to uplift and educate not only African Americans, but other students as well. And in conjunction with that task, she also has a duty to educate others on the plight of minority students from a Afro-centric perspective. She has made an academic and professional name for herself not only on the campus of IU, but other campuses around the country as a Black female professor that has remained “true to the struggle”. Professor Hughes is a true researcher, and she inspires me every day to stay true to my research interests, keep a diverse frame of reference when studying and become the best researcher I can possibly (by writing, publishing, and presenting). She is also just as committed to service, as she is to her research.

As stated before, I work as a grants manager for UWCI’s YAR. One thing I have always done regardless of my work capacity is pass along information and resources to the many people and community organizations I come in contact with on a daily basis; conferring a MA in Philanthropic Studies has equipped me with finding resources (whether tangible or intangible) and sharing them. Professor Hughes was aware of my community work and asked if there was any way I could help out some of the groups she worked with on and off campus. One particular group was the SAAB program. She worked with the SAAB staff and made them aware of some grants I had available regarding a service learning project. The grant would go to fund SAAB members as mentors as they partnered with a local high school for mentoring opportunities. She also made several other groups she worked with aware of YAR

funds and thus we now have a funding relationship with IUPUI's Twenty-first Century Scholars, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, and Upward Bound. However Professor Hughes was not done there.

She recognized my grant writing and reviewing skills and asked me to work with her as she helped various organizations seek funds from private foundations regarding providing support programs to the African American community. We have worked with the National Coalition on the Education of Black Children (NCEBC) and Indiana Black Expo (IBE) to not only set up community forums on the state of African Americans and education, but to develop comprehensive community action plans that parents, educators and community leaders can use to stay abreast on current trends in secondary and post-secondary education. Professor Hughes has even served on several steering committees involving several school districts and community organizations to offer her expertise in Black studies and research. Professor Hughes has showed me that your work does not stop in the classroom or with one publication. She has exemplified what action-research is by not only continuing to contribute to the field of Higher Education by producing publications and studies, but by taking what is learned and sharing it with the community at large and charging them to act. As an up and coming doctoral student it is very important to see "someone like me" conduct research on minority student issues while building their academic and professional career by doing so.

I end this letter by stating I hope I have been able to convey that in my opinion, Professor Hughes has excelled in being very diverse in not only her teaching, but more importantly her research and service. She has exemplified to me what it means to be an excellent professor, great researcher, and more importantly a scholar coming from a diverse background, and I am honored to provide this feedback to the Chancellor's Award Selection Committee on Dr. Robin L. Hughes' behalf. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need further information from me.

Sincerely,

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