

Student Letters

March 4, 2014

Dear Award Committee,

I am writing this letter in support of Dr. Charise Pimentel. She has to be one of the best professors that I have ever encountered at this university, as she has managed to increase my awareness regarding societal issues within this country.

When I first enrolled in RDG 4320 (Literacy Education for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Children) with Dr. Pimentel, I was not completely aware of the discrimination that Hispanics face, nor was I aware of the stereotypes regarding other cultures that run rampant within our society. One movie that I remembered Dr. Pimentel hosted was *The Harvest*. It was a documentary about children who spent their childhood working as agricultural workers, and receiving abysmal pay. I had heard so many things about those who came to this country, but I was not aware of how serious this issue was until I watched the documentary. As a military brat that has spent his entire life moving from country to country, I felt as if nobody really bothered to tell me about these issues.

I loved that Dr. Pimentel asked us so many open-ended questions about our stances regarding certain issues. Although many of us never had a clear answer to these questions, she never judged us. Her curriculum was perfect, and there was not a single thing that I would have changed. At one point we were given an assignment where we had to work in groups to construct a multicultural toy. During this time, our entire classes were struggling trying to devote time for midterms. I was even encouraged by the class to request an extension on the assignment. I was incredibly nervous, but she listened to us. It allowed us to do our best work, and gave us more time to study. She encouraged the idea of teamwork. Within her class I managed to make new acquaintances, who I now regard as some of the best people that I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. I still remember the day that she read one of my favorite childhood stories in Spanish. While there were very few of us who were able to completely understand it, there were some people who didn't have any clue what was being said. The lesson clearly put us all in a situation that many English Language Learners face today. I have encountered so many teachers with an authoritarian approach to the point that it made me loathe coming to school. For once, I actually felt safe being in a classroom.

It is because of Dr. Pimentel that she has helped me realize my importance as an African-American teacher. I had previously felt as if nobody truly believed in me, or really cared if I came to class. The thought of me giving back to this world, and installing an anti-bias curriculum fills me with such joy. I am now more aware of academic pressure that my fellow minorities face. She has even motivated to read books regarding critical pedagogy, and see what I can possibly do to ensure that none of my future students fail. For once, I actually see my future as being bright.

I hope that this letter has allowed you to see how much of an amazing professor that Dr. Charise Pimentel is, and why I strongly believe that she should receive the "Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching."

Sincerely,

Joe Pirtle

Award Committee,

It is with great honor and pleasure that I write this letter of recommendation for Professor Charise Pimentel's nomination for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching at Texas State University. I first met Professor Pimentel when I enrolled for a course she taught titled, "Multicultural Teaching and Learning" in the spring of 2013. In the fall of 2013, I, once again, enrolled in a course she created titled, "Politics of Language," so I've known her for over a year. As I've work my way through completing a thesis in the rhetoric and composition department, I've asked Professor Pimentel to be part of my thesis committee. In my project, I approach the rhetoric and composition class from an additive approach to bilingual students where I create a rhetorical backing for the use of bilingualism in texts. I engage in this discussion because I'm also currently an instructor for first-year writing courses at Texas State. Professor Pimentel indisputably deserves the Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching at Texas State University because, through her curriculum and pedagogy, she creates physical and imagined spaces for students—of all backgrounds—to respectfully and productively engage in 21st century conversations about controversial issues, such as the disenfranchisement of minority students in the education system. As it relates to me, Professor Pimentel provided me with a new vocabulary to articulate my experiences, challenged me to consider situations from different perspectives, and facilitated my participation in her classes

One of the key vocabulary words that I learned in Professor Pimentel's class was "push out." Instead of students dropping out of school, they are effectively "pushed out" because of exclusionary practices such as devaluing home languages and home knowledge. Although it may seem like common sense now, when I first heard it, it brought some clarity to my own experience. Starting my fresh(wo)man year of high school with a class of over a thousand students and finishing my senior year with less than five hundred classmates (436 students to be precise) is troubling to say the least. For many years, it hadn't made sense to me that so many students decided to drop out of school. Over 500 students in my class didn't actively choose to drop out; they were pressured into it by forces beyond their control. After my first semester in graduate school, even though I aced all of my classes, I contemplated dropping out. It wasn't that courses was too challenging, or that I couldn't complete the work, or that I didn't want to learn. On the contrary, I love learning and consider myself a hard-worker. At that point, however, I couldn't articulate my thoughts and emotions towards my own position. When Professor Pimentel introduced the words "pushed out," my current situation and those of my former classmates made sense. My classmates and I wanted to learn, but the environments, a majority of the time, do not consider the experiences and knowledge of Mexican American students. If institutions do not value the language and knowledge of Mexican Americans; then, it's reasonable for us to leave these institutions for greater autonomy and preservation of self-respect. This idea is one that I continue to explore in my own studies. In her classes, Professor Pimentel also provided me with frameworks to analyze different situations.

Literature, television, movies, and other mediums often (re)produce stereotypes that are presented to us as readers or viewers, which we inevitably and, oftentimes, unconsciously adopt as our own. Professor Pimentel provided a framework called Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze how these images are created through these mediums. For example, we analyzed how various mainstream, popular movies (re)created discourses that shape into stereotypes. I analyzed *Stand and Deliver*, a movie about Mexican American students. In this letter, I want to focus on the learning that occurred rather than the analysis of the movie. Introducing CDA as a framework to analyze movies helped us, students, to productively and respectfully discuss issues about stereotypes that these movies (re)produce, but at the same time, we also began to see how our own views of people and institutions were informed by these discourses. The discussion didn't place certain people as victims or as perpetrators. Oftentimes, conversations place the blame completely on a certain group of people,

typically the dominant one, thus, leaving all non-dominant groups as victims. However, this class discussion engaged everyone in reflection and critical analysis of our own views. We saw ourselves on both sides of the equation: we were stereotyped, but we also stereotyped others, consciously and unconsciously. The racial and ethnic tensions that sometimes force people to remain silent or speak louder than others did not exist in this discussion as everyone participated in the discussion with thoughtful and respectful comments. In the class, participating by speaking and not just listening became easy.

As a student of color with a noticeable accent to my English, I am conscious of the tokenization that may occur if I speak about issues that pertain to language practices and Mexican American experiences as has occurred in some cases. Professor Pimentel facilitated my participation in her class because she creates a sense of community in her classes; furthermore, students from all racial and ethnic backgrounds enroll, so I freely speak from a Mexican American subject position because I know that the students will challenge my views as opposed to accepting them blindly or completely disregarding them. Because of the low representation of Latinas/os in higher education, specifically graduate studies, sometimes I find myself as the only Latina/o in the class. Because I am aware of my background, I hesitate to speak because, whether it happens or not, I don't want my comments to represent the response of all Mexican American, bilingual students. From the first day in Professor Pimentel's class, I felt comfortable to provide my input into the discussion. The ethnic makeup of the class represented cultures from different parts of the world not just the United States. In her class, I became an outspoken student because I intuitively knew that people were working from similar perspectives as mine but from different areas of the United States and the world. To me, this step was liberating because I could transition from always listening to other students' points of view to actually verbally articulating mine. I was heard. Her classes provided a physical space for me to freely discuss issues, which is a difficult task to perform as an instructor.

The changing demographics and continuing globalization are factors that can't be ignored by post-secondary institutions. These institutions need to be at the forefront of these issues by producing research that will inform pedagogical, curricular, and political decisions and by teaching students to become aware of institutional and global issues that affect the next generation of citizens. Specifically, as a Hispanic Serving Institute, Texas State University is in a position to champion inclusive policies and practices that value the differences that Hispanics bring with them into the educational setting. Professor Pimentel's pedagogy and curriculum reflects her own awareness of local and global issues in the 21st century and constructs us, students, to consider these matters as we transition into to our professional careers.

Please feel free to contact me at 956.266.7844 or at j.cano@txstate.edu, and I'll be glad to elaborate on any of these topics or answer any questions.

Respectfully,
José Luis Cano



Pfc. Robert P. Hernandez
Middle School

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February 24, 2014

Dear Committee,

I am writing to enthusiastically recommend Dr. Charise Pimentel for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching. As an education professional, I have always viewed my professors as mentor teachers, paying attention not only to course content but also to instructional delivery methods. That being said, Dr. Pimentel truly stands out both for the challenging, engaging content of her courses and for the ways she models respectful, equitable classroom practices.

I took Dr. Pimentel's "Multicultural Teaching and Learning" course the summer before my first full semester at Texas State, and though I was dreading what I assumed would be a rehashing of the generic "diversity training" I had received as an undergraduate, what Dr. Pimentel provided instead was a critical lens with which my classmates and I could view our academic and professional worlds. In fact, I found this critical lens so appealing that I enrolled in her "Politics of Language" class the following semester to continue exploring the intersection of education and social justice.

In both courses, Dr. Pimentel used a thoughtful combination of critical and popular readings, online resources, carefully curated video clips, and engaging activities (a 45-minute deconstruction of the bilingual text on the back of a bag of chips!) to bring her students to a higher level of critical awareness. As a result, my classmates' and my thinking and writing about the world became noticeably more astute as each semester progressed. I have brought much of this critical awareness back to the professional setting, and am now an advocate for more equitable practices and policies on my campus.

What truly compels me to recommend Dr. Pimentel for this award, though, is the way she models equity in her classroom practices. As fiercely critical as Dr. Pimentel is in her reading of the world, she is as extravagantly generous in her reading of her students. Because of the wide spectrum of backgrounds and prior educational experiences represented among Curriculum and Instruction students, classroom discussions sometimes veer in directions not in keeping with the critical framework of the course. While it would be easy to criticize or correct students who express unintentionally stereotyped ideas, Dr. Pimentel instead takes the more challenging (but ultimately more instructional) approach of listening respectfully, assuming students' best intentions, and modeling appropriate language in her own speech and in class readings. Students in Dr. Pimentel's classes are allowed to embark on a journey towards higher-level critical understanding, rather than having their attempts shut down along the way. This is an approach that I have strived to replicate in my own dealing with political topics in the classroom.

I chose to attend graduate school at Texas State because of my belief that this university values good teaching and a cognitively engaged student body. Dr. Pimentel has proven my assumptions true, not only in her curriculum design and classroom practices, but in her university-wide initiatives such as the Quetzal Critical Film Series. Dr. Pimentel's contributions to the university are one of the reasons I can confidently recommend graduate studies at Texas State to my colleagues, and therefore I voice my support of her as a recipient of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Sincerely,

Julia E. Ross

pursing M.A., Developmental Education, Texas State University

February 27, 2014

Dr. Sarah L. Santillanes
8923 Helmick Place NE
Albuquerque, NM 87122

Dear Award Committee,

I am honored to write this letter of support on behalf of my academic mentor and trusted friend, Dr. Charise Pimentel. Dr. Pimentel, who has been nominated for the **Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching**, is more than deserving of this honor. During the time I have known Dr. Pimentel, she and I have collaborated on several projects including: three presentations, two publications, and the mentoring and completion of my dissertation. I cannot think of any other professor who is more deserving of this award.

I have been fortunate to know Dr. Pimentel since the summer of 2010. I applied for the Texas State University Predoctoral Fellowship and discovered that I required faculty sponsorship. While I knew of Dr. Pimentel and her work via another professor from my institution, I had not met Dr. Pimentel personally. Over email, I asked Dr. Pimentel if she would be willing to sponsor me. I distinctly recall how she responded to my email within that same hour, offering her full support and help. Then, when I met Dr. Pimentel in person, I found her to be a humble, wise and kind teacher. Dr. Pimentel is the type of teacher who challenges her students to always think more critically, but she has the rare gift of doing this in an unassuming way. In my case, she offered her thoughtful advice but allowed me to make my own theoretical and practical mistakes. Therefore, Dr. Pimentel provided me with the academic wisdom that I had otherwise not been taught. The process of publishing, creating a Curriculum Vitae, the art of presenting in front of graduate classes, and pacing my dissertation writing are some of these valuable lessons.

Those students who have been fortunate enough to work with Dr. Pimentel understand that teaching is not simply her profession. For Dr. Pimentel, teaching and mentoring always extend beyond the classroom doors. When she officially took me under her tutelage, Dr. Pimentel's support was continual. She took the time to bond with me outside of our academic relationship. As an example, she and her husband graciously opened their home to me during my temporary stay at Texas State University. She invited my family and I to personal dinners at her house, where her children played with my children. As a graduate student in the early midst of dissertation writing, I cannot fully explain how Dr. Pimentel's support and friendship encouraged me during that time.

As a result of Dr. Pimentel's support of me during that summer, I had grown especially close to her. I asked her if she would be willing to serve on my dissertation committee, which she quickly agreed to do. In reflection, the most significant lesson that Dr. Pimentel has imparted upon me is the importance of mentoring and collaboration. At most institutions, it is rare that professors agree to present or publish with their graduate mentees. This type of collaboration process is often a time consuming and tedious endeavor, especially with graduate students who are still trying to find their own academic voice. My present understanding of this fact makes me more appreciative of my time with Dr. Pimentel and her investment in growing me as a scholar.

As award committee members, you may not have the fortunate opportunity to meet Dr. Pimentel face-to-face. It is often difficult to illustrate how a teacher positively affects and empowers her students, as Dr. Pimentel has. For me, I can truly say that without her support, I would not have completed my dissertation. This is why I can also say, without any reservation, that Dr. Pimentel should be awarded the **Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching**. Should you have any questions for me, please feel free to contact me at (505) 720-7207 or via email at: ssantillanes@gmail.com.

Respectfully,

Sarah L. Santillanes, Ph.D
University of New Mexico



SCHERTZ-CIBOLO-UNIVERSAL CITY INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Priority 1: High Achievement For All Students
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March 14, 2014

Dear Award Committee,

I write to you today to recommend Dr. Charise Pimentel for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching. I am in the last semester of my Graduate studies at Texas State University pursuing a Masters in Bilingual/Bicultural Education. After completing several classes with Dr. Pimentel, I believe she is one of the best professors I have had. Because of her tremendous commitment to student learning, I believe she is by far the best choice for this prestigious award.

Dr. Pimentel has always taken a student-centered approach in her teaching. As students, we were allowed to take control of our learning as she took on the role of facilitator. This approach has helped me tremendously to become a better learner. Consequently, I have become a better teacher using what she has modeled so well.

The passion Dr. Pimentel shows for the content she teaches is truly inspiring. Her passion for diversity, culture, language, racial inequities, among other things, has made a positive change in how I view the world. Her love for what she teaches pushes me to make a difference, starting in my classroom, my campus, and even my school district.

The curriculum that is taught in Dr. Pimentel's classes is very relevant to the world we live in today. Her course, Multicultural Teaching and Learning, taught me and other students how to critically analyze the current educational system and explore effective pedagogies for the future. In her other course, The Politics of Language, Dr. Pimentel helped us gain an understanding for how languages and language practices are tied to racial and economic power relations in schools and society. She presents these subjects in such a way that makes students want to know more and make a difference. What I learned through these courses has helped me become more aware of diversity and allowed me to become a more prepared and effective classroom teacher.

The tools that Dr. Pimentel has given through her effective, passionate teaching and relevant content is the reason why I believe she is the perfect nominee for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching. I know she has positively impacted my education and that of many of my fellow students.

Respectfully,

Karyna Esquivel

Student of Bilingual/Bicultural Studies, Texas State University
4th grade Dual Language Teacher

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Schertz-Cibolo-Universal City ISD provides a safe, secure and challenging learning environment, through the responsible use of all resources, to afford opportunities for all students to realize their individual potential and to become responsible and productive members of society.

Elizabeth Hewett
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February 24, 2014

Dear Award Committee:

I am honored to recommend Dr. Charise Pimentel for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching. Over the past three semesters, I have taken several courses with Dr. Pimentel that broach the topic of language and language ideologies in the modern classroom, as well as society. She managed to present topics that can be delicate and controversial in a manner where all students felt confident and comfortable about sharing their perceptions. In each course, Dr. Pimentel provided various examples, both hard text and electronic media, that conveyed the struggles English Language Learners experience. Although Dr. Pimentel allowed us as students to share our own findings on various topics presented in class, she continued to facilitate classroom discussions to ensure students understood the essential components of the text. Due to Dr. Pimentel's outstanding instruction, I personally have a better understanding of the struggles English Language Learners endure, and what I, as a future educator, can do to provide these individuals a safe and secure passage through the American education system.

Dr. Pimentel successfully designed her curriculum with a well-rounded view of the current practices and uses of various languages and dialects. Her courses are graduate level and are comprised of complex texts that provide relevant insight into the bigotry and obstacles that non-native English speakers encounter when transitioning to life in primarily English speaking countries. Dr. Pimentel has written several publications over these topics which were part of the course assigned readings. Her personal experience made her perception and instruction informative and engaging. It is extremely pleasing when a professor has hands-on working knowledge of the topic at hand. Furthermore, it makes her passion for the topic more understandable and stimulating. I myself was extremely captivated by her personal experiences that she often shared with our class.

In addition, Dr. Pimentel designed her assignments to appeal to various learning styles. She provided students the opportunity to participate in various forms including verbal discussions, the use of educational technology, and written form. As a student navigating through the education curriculum here at Texas State, I know how essential it is for a successful instructor to appeal to students in diverse learning methods.

Due to her admirable pedagogical practices and well thought out curriculum, Dr. Pimentel is an excellent candidate for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching. Her passion for education and knowledge of her field of study make her an outstanding role model that both her students and peers should emulate throughout their teaching careers.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth Hewett