

March 23, 2021

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my great pleasure to nominate **Katherine (Katie) Forsythe** for an **Administrative Professional Contribution Award**. There is no doubt that Katie embodies the specified criteria for this honor: productivity, innovative thinking, positive working relationships, and a commitment to university service that exceeds expectations.

Katie and I met in May 2017 when she was hired to serve as the director of the Transformational Change Initiative (TCI), following a national search for the position. TCI is a multi-component student success initiative funded by the Provost's Office to increase engagement, academic success, and retention for WSU undergraduate students. Dr. Laura Hill (Vice Provost for Faculty Development and Affairs), Dr. Bill Davis (Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education, College of Veterinary Medicine), and I serve as the three principal investigators of this grant.

TCI is comprised on three major components: a parent-student handbook, a faculty development program (LIFT), and a peer-mentoring program (LAUNCH). Each component targets students at a different time point in the student experience, from matriculation across the undergraduate experience. As scaffolded interventions, they are intended to exert both individual effects on student success and a collective/compounding impact for students exposed to more than one component during their academic career.

As director of TCI, Katie is responsible for the daily operations and logistics of all three components of the grant. This is a HUGE job with significant responsibilities.

Let me explain.

The Parent-Student Handbook is our matriculation through first year intervention. The handbook contains a collection of activities that promote conversations between WSU-bound students and their parents about values and expectations, each designed to support a successful transition to life as a college student. For the past three years, the handbook has been disseminated to randomly selected incoming freshman as part of an associated NIH research grant. Those students and their parents provide weekly self-report assessments throughout their first year on behaviors known to undermine academic success (e.g., binge drinking, marijuana use). Though this routine data collection is conducted by a team of research associates at the University of Washington (UW), Katie is responsible for coordinating, organizing, and leading routine research meetings between the WSU leadership team and the UW team, facilitating communication between these groups between these standard meetings, and alerting TCI leadership of emerging issues/concerns. Another major aspect of this effort is the creation of a Spanish version of the handbook and this is where Katie exceeded expectations. She cultivated relationships with key campus partners, such as Multicultural Student Services, that helped us locate individuals willing to serve in training videos featuring handbook exercises. Through collaborations Katie established with Marcella

Patton and La Bienvenida, we were able to pilot materials with first generation students and their parents and collect critical feedback about the accessibility and perceived relevance of our materials before scaling up our design. In these ways, Katie's contributions were a critical part of our ability to deliver on a central TCI goal: to create strategies to decrease the equity gap for first generation and under-represented minority students.

The LIFT (Learn. Inspire. Foster. Transform.) Faculty Development Program is in its third year of implementation. LIFT introduces faculty to brief instructional interventions known to support student success and resilience. Faculty participating in this program complete a series of workshops during the spring semester, revise their courses over the summer, implement interventions in the fall, and complete peer teaching observations with other LIFT fellows. Again, Katie is responsible for handling the logistics of these elements. She collects and arranges the applications for review each spring. She plans the orientation meeting for each new cohort (30-50 faculty per cohort). She manages the Blackboard course space where faculty access the program materials and arranges the training workshops each spring on the Pullman campus. Because LIFT has been extended to faculty on the Vancouver, Tri-Cities, and Everett campuses, Katie organizes additional training workshops on the WSU-TC campus for those faculty and handles the travel arrangements and reimbursements. She also oversees the pre- and post-assessment data collection for all faculty who participate in the program. In Spring 2020, Katie took it upon herself to solve an emerging problem created by the pandemic: faculty isolation. She suggested – and organized – additional “Up LIFT” virtual lunches for our newest LIFT fellows, as a way for them to get to know one another better and build cohort cohesion (as their training was delayed due to COVID). She organized separate lunches for our previous cohorts to reconnect with one another during that difficult time. To date, LIFT has trained 153 total faculty across the Pullman, Tri-Cities, Vancouver, and Everett campuses. Each faculty member has implemented interventions in at least one of their courses and often in multiple courses. Many of these are large enrollment courses in the first and second year curriculum. Altogether, this is a significant footprint in the areas of faculty development and student success system-wide.

There is no doubt that Katie's work has been critical to our successful execution of both the Parent-Student handbook and the LIFT program. Her conscientiousness, attention to detail, time management, and ability to multi-task major responsibilities has made her an invaluable team member. We simply could not have moved these elements forward without her hard work and dedication. We know that if we ask Katie to do something, not only will it get done, it will be executed in the professional and high-quality manner that defines Katie's work.

As important as Katie's contributions have been to the handbook and LIFT, I believe what she has done in those domains is exceeded by the work she has done with LAUNCH. The LAUNCH program facilitates students' appreciation for, and engagement in, co-curricular learning opportunities such as research experience, civic engagement, leadership, entrepreneurial competitions, internships, and global education. Katie has been instrumental in the development of this program, including both its content and framework. She has worked closely with me in its initial creation as well as the ongoing revision/refinement this program has undergone over the past three years. She was likewise instrumental in creating the faculty partnerships that have allowed us to embed LAUNCH as a course component in Psych 105, HD 200, and Math 140 and in partnership with the TRIO program and Greek community.

LAUNCH is delivered in a two-part format. Part 1 is delivered “in class”. Katie and I facilitate this element. This requires as many as 11 in-class presentations each semester. Students have the option to complete the second part of the program in out-of-class workshops hosted by Katie and me, but facilitated by our LAUNCH “ambassadors”, undergraduates already engaged in a wide range of experiential learning opportunities. Katie played an active role in designing these workshops. Katie suggested, and we implemented, several innovative strategies for engaging students during the workshops. For example, Katie designed a “Mission Possible” task in which teams of participants, led by an ambassador, find experiential learning opportunities for a fictitious WSU student. Katie created the bio-sketches of six fictitious students for this exercise and mocked up the initial format for the activity. She also suggested a “gallery walk” activity as a strategy for crowd-sourcing the collective wisdom of each workshop group. After participants have spent time locating (with the assistance of their ambassador) up to three opportunities that are a perfect fit for the participants’ unique values, strengths, and goals, they then post these on tables throughout the room. Each participant is given ten Post-It notes and for ten minutes, participants circulated the room, reading students’ selections, and suggesting additional opportunities/resources/contacts based on each student’s values, interests, and goals. These creative and innovative design elements have proved to be critical elements of our programming. With the emergence of COVID in March 2020, we were forced to pivot our entire program for remote delivery. Once again, Katie was instrumental in helping reimagine key elements for virtual delivery. She created new fictitious biographies for the Mission Possible activity to include challenges students were confronting due to COVID. She reworked the activity to make it possible using ZOOM breakout rooms. Katie also identified Padlet as an alternative platform for mimicking the experience of the “gallery walk”. And she trained all ambassadors and our new undergraduate tech assistant on advanced aspects of ZOOM so each could assist, in real time, if technical problems were encountered during the virtual workshops. It is because of Katie’s creative problem-solving and “can do” attitude that we were able to successfully pivot the entire program for AY 20-21 without compromising its integrity or the values that inform it.

Participants routinely mention, in the post-assessment survey how LAUNCH has positively impacted their academic career. In fact, following program completion, high percentages of participants indicate that experiential learning is “extremely or very important” to their personal growth (74.2%), academic experience at WSU (77.5%), and preparation for their future career (87.5%). Approximately 79% feel that developing and utilizing their unique profile helped them identify opportunities that fit their values, strengths, and goals. In addition, 87.5% felt confident in their ability to incorporate experiential learning opportunities into their WSU experience using their action plan. Pre/post-assessments also suggest small but significant increases in personal growth (using a validated psychological assessment) as a function of completing the program. Finally, our preliminary data analysis suggests a small but significant increase in first year fall to second year fall retention rates for those completing LAUNCH relative to matched controls who did not participate in the program. To date, almost 3500 students have participated in LAUNCH. This impact relates directly to WSU’s strategic plan and Drive to 25 metrics, and Katie’s contributions and work sit at the heart of this success.

To date, 52 undergraduates have served as ambassadors for LAUNCH. On that front, Katie has taken the lead on developing the application and interview process for these students, played a central role in their training, and managed and tracked their timeslip hours (as these are paid appointments). Even more important, she has supported their professional development through individualized mentoring and connects them on a weekly basis with a newsletter that highlights emerging and ongoing opportunities to

help them strengthen their professional portfolios. She has served as a reference for them and written letters of recommendation for those pursuing additional opportunities. As just one example, here is what one ambassador wrote about Katie's impact on their professional and personal development:

"Katie has many great attributes. She is very organized, compassionate, and energized. Whenever I have problems, she cheerfully offers help without making me feel like a burden. And despite what her day may have looked like, she never fails to create a positive atmosphere. Katie has helped me develop my communication skills by including debrief sessions where I could express how I feel and talk with my fellow ambassadors. She has also helped me increase my team-building skills just by letting me observe her special icebreaker techniques in our pre-workshop meetings, some of which I have imitated successfully." (Dinna Testaya Bekalu, WSU LAUNCH Ambassador)

These activities are neither routine nor expected aspects of Katie's appointment. She has taken it upon herself to invest heavily in the personal and professional development of these young leaders and this commitment has made one thing evident: Katie has moved beyond executing the details of our plan (which is a huge job alone) to playing a pivotal role in shaping that plan through her creativity, innovation, and unwavering commitment to always giving 100%.

The nomination instructions for an **Administrative Professional Contribution Award** indicate, *"Exceptional is defined as going above and beyond the expected or required job performance; making a unique difference in the workplace; and/or performance that has far-reaching, compelling impacts to an employee's work area or the university."* As I hope is evident in this letter, I believe Katie exemplifies what it means to be exceptional.

For the reasons given here, I give her my highest recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Samantha Swindell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Samantha Swindell, Ph.D.
Professor of Psychology, career-track
Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, College of Arts and Sciences
Washington State University

30 March 2021

Dear APAC Administrative Professional Contribution Awards Committee,

It is my honor to submit a letter for Katie Forsythe, Director of the Transformational Change Initiative (TCI). The TCI is a \$7 million student success project that was initiated by WSU in 2016. The project was led by faculty in the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and the College of Agriculture, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences. Faculty involved in the project spanned several colleges, at least three campuses, and many departments. The leaders of the project (at the time, Sam Swindell, Denise Yost, and I) hired Katie as project director after interviewing several other candidates. Katie stood out from the pack, and to this day we thank our lucky stars that we selected her. She has been an invaluable member of the team and has gone way above and beyond our expectations and the responsibilities outlined in her position description.

As director of the project, Katie has done an exceptional job at keeping many moving parts, large and small, coordinated and moving forward over the past five years. TCI has three main components: LIFT (a faculty development project), LAUNCH (a student development project), and First Years Away from Home (a parent support project). Each of those three projects has numerous smaller processes and projects involved. Katie has run each of those projects, as well as the overall TCI work of budgeting; overseeing data collection; producing outcome and budget reports for the provost's office and Office of Research; making travel arrangements for faculty and project leaders (pre-COVID); networking with administrators and faculty on all campuses and at University of Washington; recruiting faculty, student, and parent participants; scheduling, planning, and leading team and project meetings; training and supervising undergraduate and graduate students; and more.

As an example of one of the specific projects, LIFT, Katie organizes, coordinates, and/or directs an application and selection process, a series of faculty workshops, a program evaluation, a classroom teaching observation process, construction and maintenance of online course websites, coordination with Institutional Research for tracking and analysis of student retention and academic performance, and other project responsibilities such as those outlined above (scheduling, tracking, planning, budgeting, etc.), but for each specific project as well as the overall TCI.

A few of the many things that are remarkable about Katie: first, since she was hired at the beginning of the initiative, she had to create all our organizational structures and procedures from the ground up. She quickly became a superb project manager, even though she had no previous experience in this area. She is an excellent implementer, and she is able to anticipate, prepare for, and manage all kinds of circumstances that I never would have seen coming. She does this all so smoothly, so efficiently, and so humbly, that the initiatives and its project quickly began functioning as a smoothly running machine. She is so good at her work that it is almost invisible -- she makes it look effortless, except that I know something this complicated can't possibly be as easy as she makes it look. She requires almost no supervision and often tells me what I need to be doing rather than the other way around.

Second, she consistently goes way beyond expectations, and she is always looking for the next way to improve and innovate. Her work ethic is remarkable. In addition to providing essential support for TCI, Katie has made significant contributions to the development of new ideas and new approaches in each part of the project. She has become an active partner in some of the research activities of the project, conducting participant interviews, designing and executing some complicated data collection, and serving as co-author on manuscripts. She contributed significantly to the development and revision of LAUNCH, and she helps lead and implement that project.

Third, she is a consistently positive, supportive, thoughtful presence. She remembers the birthdays of all the students, staff, and faculty she works with. She reminds us to celebrate milestones and accomplishments. She has adopted the department that serves as the project's administrative home (Human Development), and the department has adopted her back. She remembers all their birthdays too. She makes the workplace, whether in person or virtual, a delightful place to be, and she is the glue that keeps us all together.

Finally, Katie's work has had a significant impact on student success at WSU. Over ten thousand students, across four campus, nine colleges, and 55 departments, have been touched by some component of the project across the years. Students who experience LIFT or LAUNCH are significantly more likely to be retained at WSU from first to second year (the major point at which students leave), with retention rates between 4% - 10% higher than for students who have not participated in one of those interventions. LIFT faculty report significantly higher satisfaction with their teaching. The hundreds of students whose parents participated in the First Years Away from Home project are significantly less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors such as binge drinking, cannabis use, or simultaneous use of cannabis and alcohol when they come to WSU. These statistics equate to millions of dollars saved by the institution and, much more importantly, to more successful, healthier students and faculty. Those of us who initially designed TCI knew what our goals were, but Katie is the one who made those goals a reality.

I know you have many fine candidates to consider for these awards. Thank you for considering Katie's outstanding contributions to WSU's students, faculty, staff colleagues, and parents.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laura Hill', with a stylized, flowing script.

Laura Hill
Senior Vice Provost