

March 28, 2021

Administrative Professional Contribution  
Awards Committee

Dear Committee Members,

It is my distinct pleasure to nominate Jessica Gerdes, my Principal Assistant, for the 2020 Administrative Professional Contribution Award. Since my nomination of her last year, Jessica has transitioned to the department of Biomedical Sciences, where I have recently assumed the chair position. She continues as my principal assistant and retains her work in community outreach.

Jessica is one of our most accomplished AP staff. She is highly motivated, and mission driven to accomplish our goals as a community based medical school and as a land grant university. As my principal assistant, she supports me in accomplishing the goals of our department. Her most valuable qualities to me are her initiative and willingness to take responsibility for projects and to see them through to completion. She routinely goes above and beyond the call in her work for our office, the College of Medicine, and WSU. Her responsibilities in the department fall into two categories, 1) support for the chair and department faculty and 2) community outreach and mentoring projects to K-12 students throughout the state. In addition, and also very relevant to this nomination, she is active in leadership of the Administrative Professional Advisory Council (APAC) and the Wellness Collaborative on the Spokane campus. Although Jessica is accomplished in all these areas, the work of community outreach is best exemplifies the level of her accomplishments and her ability to work independently.

The mission of the College of Medicine is to produce physicians that will return to areas of Washington where we need them most, our underserved and rural regions. One strategy employed to reach this goal is to recruit students from these areas into our MD program. Since rural communities often lack health professionals that can served as role models and mentors, we have developed outreach and mentoring programs to foster connection with communities across the state and to connect with K-12 students to promote careers in medicine and other health sciences. Jessica leads this work and has poured amazing amounts of energy into it. She works independently to organize events in schools state-wide, or to bring students to our campus for events, and most recently to organize a structured program of outreach and mentoring in four rural schools in Stevens county. We maintain close communication over what activities to pursue and who to engage, and she always seeks appropriate guidance and oversight. But the work of planning and executing outreach events is largely hers. And, as I said last year, I am constantly amazed!

Since her nomination last year, Jessica has organized an additional dozen events, reaching over 3,500 kids from eight counties across the state. And the majority of these engagements were conducted virtually! COVID had a dramatic effect on how we did outreach work but with Jessica's leadership and energy, it did not prevent us from making substantial impact in outreach. As with this work in former

years, it engages dozens of faculty, staff, and students in the WSU colleges of Medicine, Pharmacy, Nursing and Education, as well as programs in the health sciences at EWU. And in the COVID era, substantial support from our IT department.

Our most involved outreach project, and the one that most exemplifies Jessica's contribution is our Stevens county project. We have developed health sciences programming for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students involving case-based learning modules and fun hands-on activities, delivered in the school by health sciences students. We are also developing a Career and Technical Education (CTE) course for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students in these schools. Jessica has led the development and implementation of this program, working with teachers and school administrators, and making on-the-fly adjustments to accommodate COVID restrictions. In the past year we have applied for, and received, an additional \$150,000 in grant funds to support this program, bringing our funding total to over \$450,000 in the past two years. Jessica was responsible for much of the content and writing of these applications. The outreach work has become the scholarly project requirement for eight medical students and Jessica is active in advising each of them. Without making this nomination letter a tome too long to read, it is really impossible to overstate Jessica's independent contribution to this important work.

Jessica is also dedicated to the work of APAC and contributing to the leadership of this important organization within WSU. In May of 2020 she assumed the role of Vice Chair of APAC and was a key contributor in developing the Career Ladders subcommittee. From October 2020 to January of 2021, she served as acting Chair of APAC in the Chair's absence. She is an advocate for her fellow AP staff members, participates in meetings with the President and Provost, and also presented to the WSU Board of Regents on behalf of APAC.

Finally, Jessica gives of her time to the Spokane campus Wellness Collaborative, a group that promotes health and well-being, both physically and mentally, for faculty, staff, and students on our campus. She is an advisor to this group and developed the Spring Festival, a very well received event that included live music, games, healthy food, and a dunk tank (of which I was on the receiving end...).

To quote from my nomination letter of last year, "Suffice it to say that I am blown away by the accomplishments of Jessica Gerdes. She has worked with me in increasing responsible roles for the past 8 years. Her accomplishments and the responsibility level of her work consistently exceed her actual job description. Jessica is the go-to person in the college for ideas and resources relevant to outreach work. And she is also a go-to person for many other areas of responsibility and expertise in our office as well."

I trust that I have left you with no doubt regarding my appreciation for Jessica's work and accomplishments. She always strives to serve and, in the process, goes far above and beyond her actual job responsibilities. Her work touches our department, our college, and WSU writ large. And through the outreach projects, her work touches youth across the state and engages health sciences students in important service work. Please accept my strong recommendation for Jessica Gerdes for the Administrative Professional Contribution Award.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ken Roberts". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ken" being particularly prominent.

Ken Roberts, PhD  
Professor and Chair,  
Department of Biomedical Sciences