



SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures—Spanish

Dear Selection Committee for the Butler Leadership in Action Award:

It is my great pleasure to write this letter on behalf of Ms. Maricel Lawrence, who is the Associate Director of Digital Education at Purdue. The words “leadership in action” conjure up precisely an image of Ms. Lawrence in my mind. When I look at your criteria, many of the phrases could have been written exactly to describe her. Her intelligence, spirit, and dedication make her a shining leader in her field at large and at Purdue in particular.

I began working with Ms. Lawrence in the late fall of 2015, when I was awarded a Digital Education grant to create an online Spanish film class. I came into the project with some skepticism, interested to see how far we could get, but Ms. Lawrence motivated me to see the broad potential that my efforts might have. She truly inspired me at every turn to catch the vision of distance education. Ms. Lawrence supervised a skillful team of course designers and other resource people and enabled me to create something far, far better than what I had initially imagined. Under her guidance, I taught the first iteration of my course last Maymester, and the results far exceeded my highest expectations. Course evaluations bore this out. I was genuinely moved to be able to reach students all around the world and help them meet their educational goals while they were doing internships, working to earn money for school, or living at home in China or Afghanistan to save costs. As I teach the course for the second time this semester, I have called on Ms. Lawrence for support a number of times, and have always gotten encouragement and help. She never fails to point me in the right direction, and to offer a word of encouragement. She is a very warm and intuitive person, which makes her a great mentor. The fact that she is bilingual and bicultural is the cherry on the parfait.

Ms. Lawrence is absolutely dedicated to mentoring faculty as we enter the new frontier of digital instruction, and of course this leads directly to results for the students. Like many people, I had some real hesitations about online instruction before I met Ms. Lawrence, because I had seen examples of online classes that were very poor. Ms. Lawrence showed me that we can pursue excellence in instruction digitally, as well as in person. The atmosphere of cooperation and creativity that she generated for my team was something that was unique in my 40 years of college teaching.

The positive influence that Ms. Lawrence had on me during initial course design did not end with me; various times since then I have had the opportunity to demonstrate my class to my peers, and several of them have in turn applied for and received the same grant. This is transforming my School of Languages and Cultures, and is making us leaders in digital education for the College of Liberal Arts. The key point to me is that Ms. Lawrence has held fast to a dedication to quality. “Good enough” is, in fact, NOT good enough for her. She keeps inspiring the group to work until we are really at the Cadillac level of Purdue residential university instructional excellence.

It is important to note that these are not idle generalizations; I can back them up with hard data. Working with Digital Ed includes accountability, and the results are measured through course evaluations and also research projects. Currently, I am engaged in a research project with Course Designer Jeff Chicki that involves measuring the amount of time students spend viewing each lecture to see if it correlates to performance on the corresponding assignments.

As a direct result of my work with Ms. Lawrence, I have been appointed a Fellow for the CLA Center for Undergraduate Instructional Excellence, for which I will design two additional online Spanish courses.

In the meantime, Ms. Lawrence and I have made plans to create a MOOC of Spanish Cinema that will be released in July of this year. This is a kind of visionary use of time and resources that I did not understand before Ms. Lawrence explained it. The global outreach of the MOOC program will give world-wide prominence to every Purdue faculty member involved. My first, quite negative reaction to the idea of a MOOC melted when she explained to me how it would work.

I can quite honestly say that my teaching career will not ever again be the same since the day in the fall of 2015 when I sat with her in the basement of the Stewart Center and discussed what we might be able to do for my course. Because of Ms. Lawrence, my colleagues in Spanish are at work right now designing online courses in "Spanish for the Professions" and "Medical Spanish." In the very near future, our graduate students will have the opportunity to improve their credentials by TAing for online courses. There are ripple effects that will be impossible to measure, although they are very real.

In conclusion, I want to be sure that you understand what a difference Ms. Lawrence has made in my life as a professor, and by extension, in the educational experiences of my students. She is in every way deserving for the Butler Leadership in Action Award, and I will be the first to stand and applaud if she is chosen.

If I may be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone, electronic mail, fax, or letter.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patricia Hart". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and personal.

Patricia Hart
Professor of Spanish
Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures
640 Oval Drive