



Women's Studies Department
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August 20, 2019

Dear University Distinguished Teacher Committee,

I am delighted to write a letter in support of designating Cathleen Rhodes as a University Distinguished Teacher. I have known Professor Rhodes as a colleague in the Department of Women's Studies for the past five years. She is a model scholar, educator, and colleague who continually inspires her students to take lessons from her classes into the community. Some of the innovative approaches to teaching Women's Studies that Professor Rhodes has developed in her classes have inspired her colleagues to integrate similar methods across the curriculum.

Professor Rhodes has worked as a lecturer at Old Dominion University since August of 2013 within the Department of English and the Department of Women's Studies, becoming a fulltime lecturer in Women's Studies in the Spring of 2018 and Senior Lecturer in the Fall of 2018. Professor Rhodes originated the entire Queer Studies curriculum at ODU. She has created, developed, and regularly teaches two courses in Queer Literatures (cross-listed with Department of English) and Queer Studies (which is part of the undergraduate Diversity Certificate). In 2019, Professor Rhodes developed a new course on Queer Oral Histories, which had students not only learn about the process of oral history as a critical methodology for documenting LGBTQ+ lives, but also collect the stories of members of the local LGBTQ+ community. The courses instructed by Professor Rhodes draw in students from across the ODU community, creating a lively forum for intellectual exchange. Professor Rhodes has developed a substantial, solid, and impactful following among students, which has increased majors and minors in Women's Studies.

Professor Rhodes also teaches Introduction to Women's Studies (WMST 201) and Women and Technology Worldwide (WMST 390T) for the department. These courses are required for our Women's Studies major and, as such, Professor Rhodes's engaging teaching style has a significant impact on students' decisions to major or minor in Women's Studies. Professor Rhodes's teaching is dynamic and innovative: she integrates a variety of visual techniques into her classroom environment and challenges students to not just "think critically" but to "do critically" through the applied projects she assigns.

Professor Rhodes's student evaluations emphasize her approachability and respect for student contributions. Her course evaluations consistently score between 4.14-4.83 on a 5-point scale. The following student comments demonstrate Professor Rhodes's pedagogical abilities:

"Professor Rhodes is approachable and available. She is open to ideas other than her

own. She works very hard to provide a wide variety of material without overwhelming students.”

“I had to learn how to analyze texts through a queer lens using real feminist and queer theory techniques, something that I had never done before. This made me think critically about how to queer writing and what this could mean for the story I was reading.”

It is clear that Professor Rhodes creates an exciting classroom that encourages critical discussion in a safe environment.

Professor Rhodes has spearheaded the Tidewater Queer History Project, which is an academic/community partnership dedicated to preserving LGBTQ+ history in the Hampton Roads area. Professor Rhodes has developed class assignments that ask students to research Norfolk locations with significance for LGBTQ people. In the Fall of 2017, Professor Rhodes’s class held a walking tour of these sites at which students gave presentations about the histories of the various locations. This kind of applied learning gives students important experience in integrating lessons from classes into various forms of public education.

Professor Rhodes is an active member of the university community. She has served on the Friends of Women’s Studies board since 2008 and is the president of Gay Cultural Studies at ODU. At the college level, she sits on the Advisory Board for the Institute for the Humanities. At the university level, she participates in the Safe Space Committee and the Diversity Advisory Board for the President’s Task Force on Inclusive Excellence. Professor Rhodes’s teaching and service work have contributed vitally to creating a more inclusive ODU community that celebrates our diversity. In 2019, Professor Rhodes’s contribution in this area was recognized with a John Broderick Diversity Champion Award.

If you require any further information to assist you in your decision, please do not hesitate to be in touch. I would be happy to speak with you further about the important contributions of Professor Rhodes to the Department of Women’s Studies and the wider ODU community.

Sincere Regards,

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

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