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University Distinguished Teacher Selection Committee
Old Dominion University
5115 Hampton Blvd
Norfolk, VA 23529

Dear Committee,

It is with great enthusiasm that I write this letter in support of Cathleen Rhodes for University Distinguished Teacher. I spent several years as Professor Rhodes' student and mentee, having participated in her Queer Studies, Queer Literature, and Queer Oral History classes before my graduation in May 2019.

These classes stuck with me long after final grades were posted, and I consider them to be some of the most innovative courses offered at Old Dominion University in my six years at the institution. It is rare to find a course that demands students involve themselves in the community around a university to the extent that Professor Rhodes' classes do, answering the question "when will I ever use this?" before students can even think the words. The year I took Queer Studies, Professor Rhodes structured the entire semester around creating a walking tour of Norfolk's LGBTQ+ history—we accessed the ODU Special Collection's archive of Our Own Community Press to conduct our research, engaging with the most complete run of Norfolk's gay newspaper that has been collected to better understand our city as it stands now. What most impressed me about this course, and the element that inspired research I later undertook with Professor Rhodes' guidance, was that the walking tour was not simply a thought exercise. We took to the streets of Norfolk and gave our final presentations in the very spots that the history we were discussing actually happened. This lit a fire under me to bring this experience to others and is what ultimately inspired Our Own Podcast, a virtual walking tour of Norfolk's LGBTQ+ history, a podcast I continue to work on to this day.

Our Own Podcast would not have been possible without Professor Rhodes' support. I was awarded the Gay Cultural Studies Research and Creativity Grant in 2018 in order to begin the podcast, and Professor Rhodes was instrumental to my success—from helping me write my grant application to spending countless hours helping me research and encouraging me to keep going. Professor Rhodes' Tidewater Queer History Project, an oral-history collection project aimed at preserving the queer history unique to Hampton Roads that I have also been involved with for a few years, provided the scaffolding that allowed Our Own Podcast to be successful, and the Tidewater Queer History Project and Our Own Podcast were the subject of an episode of the terrestrial radio show Hearsay by Cathy Lewis, a front-page newspaper story in the *Virginian Pilot*, and an article in *Scalawag Magazine*.

It is also through Professor Rhodes that I and many other students became involved in the fight to save Hershee Bar, one of the oldest lesbian bars on the east coast, leading me to give several speeches to Norfolk City Council in support of saving the historic location. Though our efforts were

ultimately unsuccessful—Norfolk City Council went ahead with the demolition of the property—I found the experience immensely educational. It was invaluable to see how decisions are made at the city level, and provided a great deal of perspective on how the closure and demolition of historically important locations sometimes happen. I was far from the only student of Professor Rhodes' that attended City Council meetings, and the enthusiasm for activism I saw from her other students was truly inspiring.

I would be remiss if I did not also mention that if it had not been for the compassion and support Professor Rhodes constantly showed me, I may not have graduated from Old Dominion University at all. She saw me through some of the darkest, most difficult times in both my academic and personal life, where I struggled to attend classes and take care of myself. She made it clear that I could come to her to work through the hard choices I had to make, and I frequently did. The love Professor Rhodes has for her students is obvious, and I am living proof of it.

I can think of no professor at Old Dominion University more deserving of the title of Distinguished Teacher than Cathleen Rhodes. She not only provides her students with innovative educational opportunities deeply grounded in the local community, but pushes them to continue their research outside of her classroom. Professor Rhodes' influence in my academic and personal life is immense, and I would not be the person I am today without her. I have no doubt that with the support of the Distinguished Teacher title and award, Professor Rhodes will be able to affect many more students' lives in the overwhelmingly positive way she has affected mine.

Sincerely,

Kira Kindley