



June 30, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in enthusiastic support of Associate Professor Anne Penner as you consider her promotion to the rank of full professor. Anne asked if I would consider writing such a letter for her, and I immediately agreed. I have known Anne well for about 5 years, and knew of her work for several years before that. Overall, I find her to be a delightful example of a well-integrated and creative academic scholar, and DU is lucky to have her. **She is a thoughtful and committed teacher, a skilled performer, and a director with a demonstrated ability to execute high quality art** while being appropriately reflective on the artistic process. She has an interdisciplinary mindset that is in line with the values of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, and **I believe she handily meets criteria for promotion to full professor.**

Please allow me to show my work in support of the statements above. I am writing primarily as a faculty member at DU in the Department of Psychology. My own research is on emotion and emotion regulation. I might argue that the study of psychology more generally, and the study of emotion in particular, has always been related to acting training and theatrical performance. In addition, I have always had a strong interest in acting and theater, earning an undergraduate major in Drama and performing in several productions during my graduate and post-doctoral training. Upon moving to Denver in 2010, I participated in the theater community as a performer, adjudicator for the Henry Awards, the Bobby G Awards, and was a theater critic (for the *He Said/She Said Critiques* blog and *The Denver Post*). However, my interests in psychology and theater were never fully academically integrated and interdisciplinary until I began collaborating with Anne.

Anne and I met after she gave a faculty lecture (what was previously the AHSS faculty lecture series) and began a series of highly stimulating conversations connecting concepts from psychological science with common components of acting training in North America. After a season of provocative and generative conversations, we were inspired to share our thoughts on how our disciplines connected with one other in a podcast. We collaboratively put together an application for CAMF funds and were grateful to receive enough funding to get the podcast launched. The podcast tackles roughly one concept per episode, first from a theatrical/acting standpoint, and then from a psychological standpoint. For example, one episode centered upon the acting technique known as substitution -- the process of aligning aspects of an actor's experience with aspects of a character's situation to improve authenticity of portrayal of that character. The parallel psychological concept was episodic memory, and we talked about how behavioral and neural studies from psychological science support current best practices (and potentially point to new ones) in using substitution for the purpose of acting.

Producing and hosting the podcast with Anne has been one of the most unexpectedly gratifying parts of my mid-career phase. She is an ideal collaborator – a generous listener and a team player, a clear communicator and someone who displays genuine excitement about exploring new ideas. I experience authentic delight when I see her name on my calendar for the day. She is disciplined enough to stay on topic when we are discussing ideas, but creative enough to make

Kateri McRae
Department of Psychology

Frontier Hall | 2155 S. Race St. | Denver, CO 80208 | 303.871.3632 | Fax 303.871.4747 | www.du.edu/psychology/aactlab

unexpected connections, and brave enough to offer half-formed thoughts for the improvement of our collaboration. She is always present in the room, actively and empathetically engaged in the conversation at hand. She thinks both broadly and deeply about acting, teaching acting, and directing students in order to maximize their growth and encourages their own self-discovery. One of her central guiding beliefs is that anyone can learn to be better at acting – something she has demonstrated over and over again in her classes and in the plays she’s directed at DU.

I was pleasantly surprised by how our podcast was received. To date, we have over 16,000 plays of across four seasons of our podcast (19 episodes). Former acting students (from DU and elsewhere), theater professionals, and academics from other universities have all reached out to us to voice their appreciation for the podcast. I find that our podcast enjoys name recognition in the local theater community – when introduced to performers at Curious Theater Company as part of a post-show talkback, I mentioned the podcast and several of them indicated that they were listeners (and fans)!

I have witnessed firsthand, and heard secondhand from students and collaborators, that Anne is a gifted performer, director and teacher. Her track record in those domains alone should qualify her for a promotion to full professor. However, my experience collaborating with her in a creative and interdisciplinary way demonstrates that her contributions to the university go beyond the traditional contributions in her area of experience. She approaches acting, and theatre more broadly, with an authentic curiosity. Anne has demonstrated that the process of articulating her craft clearly can improve and enhance it, a fundamentally scholarly notion. Her expression of this curiosity has resulted in an interdisciplinary dialogue that has successfully been shared with the university community and those beyond it. **I consider her an undeniable asset to the university.**

Sincerely,

Kateri McRae

Kateri McRae, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology