April 25, 2019

To whom it may concern:

My name is Derrick Hinton II and it is my honor to write this letter in support of Doctor Ruxandra M. Looft’s nomination for the 2019 Women of Influence Award.

I have had the privilege and opportunity to work with Doctor Looft in various capacities throughout my time as a student at Iowa State University.

As a transfer student at Iowa State University in the Fall of 2015, I was both nervous and excited for my new adventure. The first time that I met Doctor Looft was during an academic meeting to finalize my transfer plan and course schedule. From the very beginning she was rather welcoming and ensured that I was acclimated well within the department.

If it weren’t for Doctor Looft, I would have never pushed myself past my comfort zone and had some of the most amazing professional and academic experiences that I have. With her guidance, leadership, and support, I served as a Global Student Ambassador for the Department of World Languages and Cultures and was able to successfully study and complete an internship abroad in Cáceres, Spain. Living abroad was something that I had always wanted to do but was extremely nervous about. As with all of her students, Doctor Looft encouraged me to break down those borders and boundaries and to try something new. At the time, I did not know just how much this would positively impact my life professionally and academically.

I am eternally grateful for Doctor Looft encouraging me to take this opportunity. As a student of color and someone who identifies as Afro-Latinx, this study abroad program helped to accomplish one of the biggest goals I have set for myself; to learn Spanish. I did not grow up speaking the language and because of that, I always felt like I was missing a part of my identity.

During my senior year at Iowa State, I was fortunate to have Doctor Looft as my faculty mentor during my independent study for my capstone research in international studies. In July of 2017, I had the opportunity to spend three weeks in Berlin, Germany alongside Doctor Looft, Doctor Mark Looney, and 20 of my peers and from the ISU Department of World Languages and Cultures.

While in Berlin, I worked with Doctor Looft to draft research for my international studies capstone, focusing on Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code; a ban on homosexuality. Doctor Looft challenged my peers and me to explore and research the history behind the art, architecture, and historical memorials throughout the city, present our findings to our peers, and follow up with discussion. The purpose of this program was to understand what impact the Holocaust and the Cold War had on Germans and the rest of the world, and to challenge the ways in which we (as humans) choose to memorialize tragic events in history.

This opportunity afforded me and my peers the ability to enhance our international perspectives and a chance to analyze the differences and parallels between German politics and history, and those of the United States. Throughout the course in Berlin, Doctor Looft made a large impression on me and unknowingly challenged me to look critically and positively at my own world view and identity as a homosexual cisgender male.

Following my research in Berlin with Doctor Looft, I decided to take German 370G with her. German 370G was a Women and Gender Studies (WGS) course created by Doctor Looft titled, “Working Girl: German Women in Male Professions.” Working Girl offered students from various identities and backgrounds an opportunity to take a look inside traditionally male-dominated professions in which women are represented through media. The purpose of this course was to show how women currently impact and have impacted foreign diplomacy, fine arts, sciences, sports, politics, and etcetera.

Doctor Looft’s course was strategic, monumental, and innovative in the way that it offered students an opportunity to understand the idea and politics behind what it means to identify as a women and work in traditionally male-dominated fields. Through this course, we were able to research women’s involvement in innovation throughout history, view what the current professional climate is like for women across various disciplines, hear from female-identifying guest speakers in our local community on topics ranging from local politics, international education and affairs, to what it is like to be an immigrant and female in a traditionally male profession.

I am most grateful for Doctor Looft’s class because it offered candid discussions and teachable moments about race, ethnicity, feminism, classism, homophobia, differences in political ideologies, intersectionality, and gave every single student a seat and a voice at the table. This is what sets Doctor Looft positively apart as a lecturer, adviser, mentor, advocate, and friend.

Even beyond graduation, Doctor Looft continues to encourage her former students to pursue new growth-provoking challenges and opportunities. Because of such encouragement, I, a Spanish major will proudly be serving as a Cultural Ambassador for the 2019-2020 U.S. Congress-German Bundestag Youth Exchange Program. I never would have dreamt it possible that I would be participating in such a prestigious governmental program.

Doctor Looft is more than deserving of this award. She has dedicated countless hours of her time to ensure that students, children, and members the community around her are thriving to the best of their potential. She is a trailblazer and a trendsetter. It is not every day that you meet a human who is as compassionate, driven, and humble as Doctor Looft is. As a first-generation college student, immigrant to the United States, a mother of two, wife, writer, lecturer, director of the Sloss Center for Women and Gender Equity, volunteer, board of trustees’ member to our local library, mentor, and friend, she is an inspiration to all.

It is my sincerest hope that you seriously consider Doctor Looft for this phenomenal award.

Sincerely,

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Derrick Hinton II