To Whom It May Concern

I am writing in support and recommendation of Dr. Natalie Mountjoy as a continued candidate for tenure at Western Kentucky University. I worked under Dr. Mountjoy as part of my Graduate Teaching Assistantship from Fall 2018 – Spring 2020. She demonstrates a very strong work ethic and sincere dedication to her students and teaching assistants.

In my time working with Dr. Mountjoy, I have witnessed first-hand her hard work and tireless attitude towards creating a better curriculum for the BIOL 121 class. In the past four semesters, she has succeeded in completely revamping the learning process of the students. In the past, WKU had implemented a traditional, cookie-cutter approach that gives the students a list of things to do to run an experiment and assumes they all will get the same result. Additionally, any deviation from the set list may give incorrect results and ends up discouraging the students and creating a knowledge gap; because students are basically following a recipe, they have little understanding of the experimental process and therefore have trouble realizing why their answers look different. While this teaching design is not inherently bad and has helped many students understand experimental design, an innovative approach that gives students the creative power may be the best method to teach critical thinking and problem-solving skills. However, implementation of this method would require a complete renovation of the WKU BIOL 121 curriculum.

Dr. Mountjoy has worked tirelessly to create an inquiry-based learning approach that gives the student both the power and responsibility to create their own experiment during each BIOL 121 class session. This project took an incredible amount of forward thinking and troubleshooting. During Spring 2020, I was part of her group of teaching assistants responsible for implementing this new design to the students. During the first class that spring, I noticed immediately how the students thought and behaved differently, attempting to solve problems rather than follow a strict protocol. Without Dr. Mountjoy's hard work and creative thinking, this new class design would not have been possible. Because of her, I believe future students enrolling in BIOL 121 will finish the class with a better foundation of the scientific process and why that process is so important.

In addition to her strong work ethic, Dr. Mountjoy has displayed an amazing patience and kindness to her students. This is evidenced through her strong communication skills (in the lecture hall, the lab, online, and one-on-one) and her willingness to listen and encourage students despite whatever difficulties they may be facing. Dr. Mountjoy praises critical thinking and gently confronts mistakes and bad decisions. She is by no means a pushover, but treats her students and teaching assistants with respect, while also holding them to a high standard that she will help them achieve. As a teaching assistant, I learned so much from her patience and dedication to us and her students.

In one particular instance, I made a big mistake while grading assignments for a group. The group was unhappy with the grade they were given. When Dr. Mountjoy and I talked about it, she did not agree with me, but rather took patience and time to show me why I was wrong and how I could do better. It would have been easy for her to get upset, but she was careful in her instruction and criticism. These sorts of character traits go a very long way in promoting a workplace and learning area where students feel comfortable asking questions, making mistakes, and ultimately learning from them. As a

teaching assistant, I could count on Dr. Mountjoy for sincere, thoughtful feedback on my performance and how best to improve it.

Finally, I would just like to point out that during Spring 2020, when WKU went online because of the Covid-19 pandemic, she worked extremely hard to develop an online version of BIOL 121 with virtually no warning. She also attempted consistent communication with her students, despite their lack of reciprocation. This was not an easy task, and I think this goes a long way towards her validity as a professor.

I honestly cannot say enough about how excellent of a professor and mentor Dr. Mountjoy is. She legitimately cares about her students and teaching assistants. She works hard, with a positive attitude, and communicates well. I believe she is an excellent candidate for tenure and will provide WKU with innovate teaching material that can be used for years to come.

Wesley Payette

WKU Graduate of 2020

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