2 April 2021

To: James Noel

From: Nancy J. S. Peters, adjunct, Chemistry Professor

Re: RECOMMENDATION FOR MINDY (MELINDA) CAPES FOR LMC TEACHER OF THE YEAR

I would like to whole-heartedly and enthusiastically recommend Mindy Capes as the LMC Teacher of the Year. Her commitment to LMC, its students, its teachers, and its support staff is evident in everything she does.

As a relatively new adjunct (first assignment in chemistry in Fall 2018), I met Mindy in the interview process and communicated with her almost as often as with the chair of Physical Sciences, Dennis Gravert, because our hours on campus often overlapped. She worked to facilitate my assignments by answering questions and sharing her own syllabus and information for courses I would be teaching. She listened to my suggestions regarding the chemistry program and was open to alternate ideas. When problems arose, she discussed them with me and provided guidance and support on ways to resolve them. She has also been helpful with issues outside the classroom, directing me to the office I needed for assistance or finding the answer herself.

I see her in meetings with other members of the department and notice the fine qualities of leadership that she demonstrates as the new department chair: she encourages input, invites careful consideration, and builds consensus. She thinks ahead, as her review of assessment data and student learning outcomes (scheduled as flex meetings) has shown, and does not just respond to directives.

I have been a department chair and faced a number of challenges over the years. I am amazed at how well Mindy has managed to take on the role of chair of the department during a pandemic that has lasted over a year, with a new campus opening, with emergency staffing needed. The department is moving forward, classes are meeting, student concerns are being addressed, faculty concerns are being addressed. Through it all, she still smiles and encourages and is enthusiastic.

While I have not attended any of her classes, I am aware of the high regard students have for her when I have an opportunity to meet them. We occasionally discuss situations that occur in her classes and I am impressed with how she handles them. I have asked Nicole Trager to summarize all the work Mindy does with students through MESA and her comments are below.\*

I have worked with her on developing an in-house, zero-cost Laboratory Manual for students in the Chem 25-26 sequence. Despite becoming chair of the department during a pandemic with all its challenges, she completed a fair share of the work for the manual. She specifically introduced a font that clears up some confusion (the difference between lower case “l” and the number “1”) and works well for people with dyslexia.

In discussion about laboratory work, she engages the lab manager, Paul West, and shows consideration for him and the staff responsible for maintaining the building. She works extensively with Nicole Trager, the director of the MESA program, to provide the programs, facilities, and support the students need.

Mindy Capes is the sort of professor I would want my grandson to have, the department chair I support, the colleague I trust, and an excellent representative of the best LMC has to offer.

\*Mindy’s involvement *(from Nicole Trager)*

MESA: Prior to being Physical Science Chair, Mindy served for 5 years as MESA’s appointed faculty sponsor. In this official capacity Mindy served LMC MESA students through Liaison with faculty on Office Hours, Classroom visits, New instructional information (books, courses etc.), MESA Program participation. She helped create and host Flex Meetings. She worked on the back end with program progress, improvements, planning, and state renewal proposals. Mindy supported MESA in intake and orientation, Field trips, On campus events, student support, workshops and so much more. Over the years Mindy helped our MESA program grow from 160 students to over 400 students. While she is department chair she has handed over the reins, but she remains heavily involved and supportive of the MESA program

Chemistry Workshops: Over the years Mindy has created Chemistry 25 workshops to help students get acquainted with general chemistry before the semester starts. These workshops are hosted by faculty and students to help incoming students know what to expect from the course. One of the reasons for the workshops was the success and retention rates of Chemistry. Since implementation of the workshops in each spring and fall semesters Mindy has seen a significant increase in both success and retention rates in students in chemistry for those that have taken the workshop vs. those that have not.

…she has presented her findings as a flex and has helped other STEM departments such as Brentwood Math get a similar workshop up and running.

STEM Jam: STEM Jam is a free one-week program prepares incoming students for a comprehensive STEM college experience that focuses both on STEM subject prep and STEM Social Life. Mindy is one of the pioneers for STEM Jam in conjunction with MESA and our STEM group. She saw a need for students to get acquainted with the college and become a cohort early on. This program is quite an undertaking and she performs many duties, she does a chemistry workshop, team building for every day, as well as be there for student support. Most faculty are only asked to be there for their 2 hour workshop. Mindy is dedicated and is there all day the whole week as well as prep and planning.

WiNS: The Women in STEM Club started a few years ago. A few years in Mindy was asked to step in as an advisor and she happily did. Women in STEM (WinS) club at Los Medanos College dedicated to inspiring students to take interest in the STEM field regardless of their background or identity. It is all-inclusive and offers opportunities for WinS members to experience new things and learn about the many fields of interest in STEM as we attend as many events and opportunities that arise. Mindy is a dedicated advisor that meets with her members regularly and helps them find opportunities for outreach, field trips, even pandemic zoom meetings. Her club students really look up to her.

Chemistry Research Projects: Mindy believes in her students. She has added research both in her classroom and outside of her classroom. Research projects have been shown to increase persistence in STEM. So she has added experiences for her students to explore science not just by the book. They can do so in a classroom setting, or even as an independent project. Some have even gone on to be mentored and present their research at national conferences. She truly cares for student’s development.

STEM Symposium : Mindy is heavily involved in putting on the annual STEM symposium for LMC. The STEM Symposium gives students the opportunity to present their research to members of the college community in hopes that it would peak students interest in the STEM program and provide them information about science and research. Previous symposium had 170 attendees. She helps plan the symposium, prep student’s presentations, and put on the symposium. It is a great STEM event!