December 13, 2010

To: Graduate Committee

Department of Sociology

University of Miami

I have been asked by Christina Sanchez-Weston to write a letter of recommendation in support of her application for admission to the University of Miami Doctoral Program in Sociology; I am delighted to do so. Christina is arguably the outstanding student of the last three graduate cohorts. She is well read, articulate, engaged and active. I have known Christina for three years both personally and professionally. She took two independent study courses with me, one in postmodern social theory last semester and one in critical pedagogy several semesters ago. She also sat in on a graduate seminar this semester that I co-taught called Globalization and Ethics. I was on her comprehensive exam committee and have been working with her since her graduation on the history and thought of the Enlightenment and colonialism. We have also worked together with students from my Social Theory and Social Problems classes to organize students to resist the newly enacted exclusionary admissions policies of the SDSU administration.

I have taught undergraduate courses, lower and upper division, and graduate courses at San Diego State for the fourteen years. Christina is in the top 1% academically of students that I have taught. Her academic work has always been of high quality; she is articulate in both interpersonal interactions and in class presentations, and her writing is excellent. But that which impressed me most had to do with a multi-student independent study on critical pedagogy. Christina created the course with two other graduate students who came to me and asked if I would undertake an independent study with them. They wanted to read outside the tradition; they wanted to create the reading list; and they wanted to meet weekly like a seminar. The reading list consisted of authors such Lao Tzu, Martin Buber, Leslie Marmon Silko, Simone Weil, Erich Fromm, Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux. We met every week for at least three hours. It was, for me, the best teaching experience that I have had. The students always came prepared and the discussions were lively and intelligent. Christina stood out. Her questions and comments reflected not only that she had done the reading but also that she had engaged the material. Christina is the reason the course worked out as it did; she was the driving force behind the course and the student whose contribution most helped it reach the level it did.

A reflection of Christina’s commitment to learning and continual research is the fact that she has continued to meet weekly with me since her graduation. The reading she has been doing focuses mainly on the Enlightenment and colonialism. We have read Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, Isaiah Berlin and Eduardo Galeano among others.

Christina’s commitment to progressive education is practical as well as theoretical. Two semesters ago the SDSU administration chose to impose new admissions policies. These policies will have a significant negative impact for poor and minority students. Christina and students in two of my courses brought together a grass roots coalition of students and student groups to challenge these policies. In a meeting of the groups, Christina challenged the Associated Students to take a position against these policies. As a result, the AS, which has been an extension of the Administration for years, has taken a public position against the policies. Subsequently, the coalition organized a walkout and a rally, at which Christina spoke, directly challenging President Weber, who was present, and his claim that his policy decisions are based on economic necessity.

I highly recommend Christina for the program and I believe that she would be successful in the program and that she will be a good representative of the program. If I can be of any further assistance I can be reached at [psemm@mail.sdsu](mailto:psemm@mail.sdsu) or by phone at SDSU at 619-286-5254.

Sincerely,

P. Tom Semm

Department of Sociology, SDSU

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