

SUNY ONEONTA

Office of Equity and Inclusion

February 23, 2022

TO: SUNY Potsdam

RE: Letter on behalf of Michael Popovic

I write this letter in support of Michael Popovic based on his service to the SUNY Potsdam campus community, which I believe is a critical component in the consideration for the tenure and promotion process. During my tenure as Associate Vice President and Chief Diversity Officer at SUNY Potsdam, from summer 2016 through fall 2020, I had the opportunity to interact and work very closely with Michael Popovic. Besides his faculty responsibilities, Michael was very active in other areas on campus, notably as regards the following initiatives: Preparing and Organizing for Change (POP): Teaching, Learning and Practicing Racial Justice Steering Committee; the Days of Reflection (DoR) initiative; the Gender and Sexuality Office (GSO); the Potsdam Diversity Ambassadors & Mentor (PDAM) Program; the Committee of Champions: Transformational Student Experiences & DEI; the Inclusive Excellence Committee; and the Soliya's First-Year Connect Program. I wish to attest to Michael's selfless, passionate, and dedicated service to help foster SUNY Potsdam's diversity and inclusion and student retention and success goals.

During his tenure as a member on the POP, from 2015 through 2018, Michael helped organized anti-racism workshops. He also organized and facilitated readings for faculty, including a four-day guest facilitators training. Following the beginning of my tenure as SUNY Potsdam's CDO, Michael and other POP members actively supported the framework of the newly created Division of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DDEI), including assisting with the development of new DDEI initiatives like the Days of Reflection, established in November of 2016. Michael served as the Coordinator of the DoR initiative from 2018-2020 and was responsible for the overall coordination of the event series. He is a member of the DoR Committee since 2016 to present, and has actively supported every event since then, making very significant contributions that have made the initiative sustainable. As committee member and chair, he successfully organized and executed the DoR and expanded the scope of topics covered. He worked earnestly to diversify the speakers at the DoR and included student participation, notably from the Black Student Alliance. Michael assisted in recruiting new members to diversify the make-up of the committee with a focus on the PoC membership. He contributed in streamlining many of the DoR processes and created a comprehensive Teams page to help with institutional memory and organization of resources.

Michael helped organized and executed every DoR event since Fall 2016, including the following personal accomplishments: gave 4 DoR presentations mainly focused on immigration and race, and dialogue; organized and participated in 4 panel discussions on free speech and dialogue across difference; organized and participated in two film screenings on immigration and led the panel discussion afterwards; recruited and managed student volunteers for DoR events; organized and managed the mandatory pre-presentations for all new presenters with student volunteers; recruited and supported faculty presenters at DoR; recruited and organized many of the events and guest speakers and successfully managed the oftentimes sensitive and difficult DoR-related communications.

The Gender and Sexuality Office was another new addition to the campus in 2018 during my tenure, as CDO. Michael served as a co-Coordinator of the GSO, sharing all responsibilities with another staff. In this inaugural role, he worked in partnership with the other co-coordinator on several key initiatives and processes. The following were accomplished: developed and repeatedly refined gender and sexuality workshops, trainings, and presentations (ranging from 45 minutes to 4 hours); presented between 8 and 15 times each semester in front of various audiences on campus (faculty, staff, students, RAs, PDAM students, Summit Program, etc.), at regional educational institutions (both college and high school), for a larger North Country audience (i.e. SOAR), and beyond (social justice group in Raleigh, NC); supported the LGBTQ+ community on campus through work on initiatives and inclusive programming in DDEI; established SUNY Potsdam's Lavender Graduation and successfully executed the event 3 times; created educational presentations/displays for special events such as Transgender Remembrance Day; held weekly office hours during the semester to help support the LGBTQ+ community in a variety of ways; established and maintained, for 1 year, a comprehensive LGBTQ+ resource page for SUNY Potsdam; organized and facilitated a bi-weekly LGBTQ+ support group in cooperation with the counseling center for 1.5 years, and provided assistance to individual students of the LGBTQ+ community.

Michael Served as Potsdam Diversity Ambassadors and Mentor (PDAM) program Faculty Advisor from 2018 – 2019. He served on the Faculty Advisory Committee and worked on the coordination of the program. In this capacity, Michael contributed in creating and executing workshops for PDAM students on dialogue across difference and on the LGBTQ+ community and allyship. He also reviewed applications and helped in the selection of students, participated in additional trainings with PDAM students during multiple half-day and full-day sessions, and supported PDAM students in their work on campus. As a member of the Inclusive Excellence Training Committee since 2020, Michael worked tirelessly to continue to support the activities of the Division of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and also participated in various events and activities, such as convocation and multicultural weekend, to support students. He created a workshop on white privilege and racism in the United States, as well as dialogue opportunities on anti-racist practices and reflection. Also, as a member of the Committee of Champions: Transformational Student Experiences & DEI from 2017-2019, Michael contributed in raising awareness about the unequal opportunities our students of color face when trying to engage in applied learning activities. He conducted needs assessment for more inclusive applied learning opportunities across all three schools and laid the groundwork for the First-Year Connect (1YC) program, which allows student to engage directly in facilitated dialogues across difference.

Since spring 2020, Michael has served as chair of the 1YC Committee. Prior to my departure from SUNY Potsdam at the start of fall 2020, I observed and appreciated Michael's activities in this area. He laid the groundwork for the establishment of Soliya's First-Year Connect Program (1YC) at SUNY Potsdam as a two-year pilot starting summer 2020, which included securing sustainable funding (attracting over \$200,000 in external funding to SUNY Potsdam), receiving buy-in of all important stakeholders on campus, and organizing a full-day visit by Soliya and the donors. He also designed and suggested organizational structures for running the program at Potsdam. Michael received approval from President's Council to create the 1YC, received support for the suggested MOU, and created the new position of Coordinator for the program that he currently occupies. In preparation for taking up the coordinator role, he received 20 hours of dialog facilitation training (plus 40 hours of homework) to become a Soliya facilitator, after which he facilitated two international dialog groups during spring and fall 2020.

Michael put together a core group of faculty, the 1YC Committee, to aid in the launch of 1YC; this committee has helped to promote the 1YC program with SUNY central in Albany in front of the SUNY Task Force on Global Learning for All: Education for a Sustainable Future. Michael has continued worked to fundamentally redesign the approach to 1YC, explicitly including anti-racist practices, principles, and sustained dialogue for future facilitators. Michael's other accomplishments in this area include the following: adjusting and redesigning the roll-out of 1YC at SUNY Potsdam; recruiting and supporting 37 faculty and alumni through facilitation training and anti-racism dialogues in summer and fall 2021, respectively; successfully organizing and executing the first round of the 1YC during summer 2020; helping to design, revise, and apply a curriculum for sustained anti-racism dialogue sessions; helping to organize and facilitate anti-racism dialogue for 4 White (Un)Learning and Action Groups throughout Fall 2020; supporting the BIPOC members of the Anti-Racism Dialogue Coordinator Committee.

Furthermore, Michael applied for and received approval from the SUNY central administration to move forward with 1YC; generated surveys and collected feedback from both the first student participants, anti-racism dialogue participants, and 1YC facilitators; prepared all aspects of the second larger round of the 1YC dialogues during January 2021; maintained an excellent working relationship with Soliya throughout the process and coordinated SUNY Potsdam's efforts for the 1YC program with theirs; provided feedback to Soliya for their training sessions on anti-racism and inclusion of the LGBTQ+ community; engaged in additional fundraising activities for the 1YC program at SUNY Potsdam; started the design of a credit-bearing facilitation training program for future student facilitators at SUNY Potsdam; served on the First Year Student Experience Task Force in his role as 1YC Coordinator to help imbed 1YC into the orientation process. He also met with WAYS 103 repeatedly during all of 2020 to find a good way to integrate the Soliya experience into the Pathway curriculum.

I hope the foregoing will contribute in your evaluation of Michael's tenure application process.

Sincerely,

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