



THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Potsdam

January 15, 2022

Dear Department of Political Science,

I am pleased to recommend Michael Popović for promotion and continuing appointment. I have worked closely with him since 2015 on two campus service projects. At every turn, Michael has been extraordinarily generous, collegial, and effective. He is a strong leader who fosters collaboration, problem-solving, and excellence. He is vitally important to our campus community, especially to our programming in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

Michael served on the steering committee that I chaired for a year-long, SUNY-funded program, “POP,” which included four days with guest facilitators on campus, workshops and readings for faculty, and the creation of faculty working groups. Michael’s contributions were invaluable, and his positive personality helped to galvanize the team as we managed this large project.

In November 2016, our focus shifted to “Days of Reflection: Education for Racial Equity and Justice.” Days of Reflection’s goal is to increase racial equity and justice at SUNY Potsdam by starting conversations about race and increasing the racial literacy of our campus community members. Every semester, this campus conference offers 10-14 sessions over four days and draws 700 - 1,000 students. Its success has depended upon many hours of work by volunteers. Michael has made extraordinary contributions as a presenter, a member of the Planning Committee, and as Coordinator.

Michael was one of the first faculty members to contribute to the Days of Reflection conference. In Spring 2017, he organized a panel titled, “Lessons for the U.S. Today: Japanese American Internment and the European Refugee Crisis.” Over the next three semesters, he presented three individual sessions and spoke on a panel, all of which are listed on his CV. Each of his individual sessions was extremely popular and successful. After intense preparation, he began each session with a substantive introduction to the issues; he moved on to explore critical questions; and he engaged students in reflection through meaningful small-group activities. In every session, Michael’s effective pedagogy and intellectual acuity elicited tremendous engagement among the student participants. In contributing this series of presentations, he helped to forge the success of

Department of English and Communication • Phone: (315) 267-2005 • Fax: (315) 267-3256
44 Pierrepont Avenue • Potsdam, New York 13676-2294 • www.potsdam.edu

Days of Reflection – and he demonstrated his characteristic generosity, commitment, and professionalism.

In Spring 2018, Chief Diversity Officer Dr. Bernadette Tiapo appointed Michael as the first compensated Coordinator for Days of Reflection. For two years, he skillfully managed every aspect of the conference. In every task and decision, he showed extraordinary leadership, responsibility, effectiveness, and sensitivity. While brilliantly facilitating our collaborative work on the Planning Committee, he also represented the conference to others on and off campus, resolved problems and conflicts, and ensured our timely success.

Michael's ability to communicate and reach consensus was remarkable. Each Days of Reflection program includes a blend of repeated sessions, new presentations, and events offered by special guest presenters. We believe that the success of the Days of Reflection program hinges upon communicating with presenters weeks or months in advance to create a relevant, powerful, and representative program. This planning includes many nuanced and, sometimes, difficult conversations among the Coordinator, Planning Committee, and Presenters. Michael had a knack for bringing tense situations to a creative resolution. His extraordinary skills in dialogue and diplomacy ensured that this process was conducted carefully and successfully.

At the same time, coordinating the conference required Michael to manage a wide range of details. He planned around multiple campus calendars, identified and reserved space, and coordinated with presenters and facilities managers about details such as seating set-up and technical needs. Additionally, he organized pre-presentations for student volunteers in order to ensure the appropriateness of content and language. Michael also took responsibility for processing attendance, collecting and analyzing participants' evaluations, organizing various post-event tasks, and adjusting our future planning based on lessons learned. He requested and oversaw compensation of guest speakers' travel expenses and stipends. In many of these areas, Michael enhanced and streamlined our processes.

Michael maintained the intellectual rigor of the conference while encouraging new opportunities for meaningful interaction among session participants. Under his leadership, student attendance grew dramatically and, by necessity, we offered our first virtual program in Spring 2020. While he delegated and collaborated well, he also relieved the rest of the Planning Committee members of much stress and worry about communication and the overall management of all sorts of details. As a result, we all functioned more effectively; thus, he made the conference more manageable and more sustainable.

All of this Michael did for a relatively low level of compensation. To earn this compensation, he also served as Co-coordinator for Gender and Sexuality in the Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. At the same time, he performed other volunteer duties within the Division while also expanding the reach of Soliya Connect on campus. Michael's success in these efforts demonstrates his values as a colleague, his capacity as a campus leader of DEI initiatives, and his dedication to the College. Through his outstanding service, Michael has made exceptional contributions to SUNY Potsdam's fundamental goals and values, as articulated in the Potsdam Pledge, the Potsdam Strategic Plan, and the Potsdam DEI Strategic Plan.

In Fall 2019, Michael and two colleagues shared the Days of Reflection model in a panel presentation at the annual SUNY Diversity Conference. Their presentation was enthusiastically received by colleagues from across SUNY, many of whom were inspired to consider launching similar programs. Before proposing this session, Michael conferred with the Planning Committee to secure our approval. He kept us apprised of the plans for the presentation, and he reported back on the experience in detail. These actions reflect his commitment to a solid foundation of trust among the members of the Planning Committee, a commitment that ensures healthy and persistent engagement within the team.

After Spring 2020, funding was cut and Michael stepped down as Coordinator to focus on First Year Connect while remaining on the Days of Reflection Planning Committee. We all collaborated, with great effort, to offer the conference virtually in Fall 2020 and Spring 2021. Attendance was strong, even when other campus programs were not drawing participants. Unfortunately, several factors have led us to temporarily suspend the program. Days of Reflection is one of many affordable and engaging campus programs created over the past five years which are now defunded, defunct, or suspended.

I recommend Michael, without reservation, for promotion and continuing appointment. Please contact me if you need any further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Mitchell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a period at the end.

Dr. Jennifer Mitchell
Associate Professor in the Department of English and Communication
Writers' Block Director
mitchejk@potdam.edu
315-212-9121