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Re: Jennifer Landeta Vidal's Application to the NIMHD MHRT Program

Dear Selection Committee:

I enthusiastically recommend Jennifer Landeta Vidal for the NIMHD Minority Health and Health Disparities Research Training (MHRT) Program. Last fall Jennifer began our two-year MPH Program in Epidemiology at the Joseph J Zilber School of Public Health, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM). I had the pleasure of interacting with her throughout the fall semester as she was a student in a seminar course I teach, *PH 700-Structures of Inequality and Population Health*. We also met to discuss her career goals. **Jennifer is an ideal applicant for the MHRT Program** – she is Latina, bilingual (Spanish and English), grew up in a socio-economically disadvantaged zip code of Milwaukee, has outstanding research skills and experiences, and is wholly committed to a research career focused on the elucidation and elimination of health disparities.

**Academically, Jennifer excels.** She graduated Magna Cum Laude from her undergraduate degree in biological sciences (pre-med emphasis) with a cumulative GPA of 3.789 and she was on the Dean's Honor List her last year in the program where she earned a GPA of 3.887 across 32 credits of mostly upper division biological sciences coursework. In her first semester in our MPH program in Epidemiology, she achieved **straight As (GPA 4.000) in 12 credits of graduate coursework**. Only a handful of MPH students achieve a perfect GPA in their first semester. Jennifer accomplished this while simultaneously working full-time! The coursework included two methods courses with labs (our MPH core epidemiology and biostatistics courses) as well as our core environmental health sciences course and a research-based health disparities course (PH 700).

In PH 700, students learn the foundations of health equity research and practice, including skills in scientific writing, conducting systematic literature searches, critically analyzing and synthesizing health disparities literature, and self-reflexive praxis. Jennifer performed at the very top of the class across all assessments. Of note, she earned a perfect score on a major conceptual review paper that summarized her findings from a systematic search and synthesis of literature on macro structural determinants of a health inequity. She chose to focus on inequities in COVID-19 outcomes in the United States among Hispanic/Latinx adults compared to non-Hispanic White adults. This paper included a detailed methods and results section, including an evidence table. I have taught this course for several years now and this was my first time awarding a perfect score. **Jennifer's paper diligently and clearly synthesized evidence** that showed how structural racism operates via multiple institutions (e.g., public health and health care, housing, and the labor market) to impact the quality and distribution of social determinants of health (e.g., living conditions, psychosocial stressors) to ultimately become embodied and cause the inequity. Her paper was sophisticated and detailed, documenting higher policing in communities of color; discriminatory hiring practices; migration policies that criminalize especially Latinx migrants, cause fear of deportation, and prevent Latinx populations from accessing social and health resources; under resourced and racially/economically segregated neighborhoods (linked to limited COVID testing sites, unequal access to hospitals with quality health care); and language barriers

to public health information. Overall, her paper was succinct yet thorough, accurately contextualized findings from each study, and demonstrated her ability to analyze an array of determinants of racial and ethnic health disparities.

Outside of the classroom, Jennifer has **considerable applied health disparities research experience**. Since October 2021, she has been employed full-time as a Program Research Assistant in the Center for Advancing Population Science at the Medical College of Wisconsin. She works on a NIDDK/NIH-funded R01 project, HOME DM-BAT, which is a five-year prospective, randomized clinical trial designed to test the effectiveness of a home-based diabetes-modified behavioral activation treatment for low-income, African American and Hispanic/Latinx seniors with type 2 diabetes mellitus. Jennifer is responsible for recruiting, scheduling, and consenting study participants, data collection (including quantitative surveys and phlebotomy), and REDCap data entry. For this work she regularly visits underserved older adult diabetic patients in their homes. She has shared that she has seen first-hand the social determinants of health at play. When collecting data, she learned that many study participants live well below the federal poverty level, in unfavorable housing conditions, with limited transportation, and little formal education beyond high school. Because of these barriers, some participants are not able to regularly test their blood sugar levels and/or take their medication as prescribed, some go hungry, and many are severely depressed. These experiences informed her decision to obtain her MPH in Epidemiology so that she would not be limited to offering resources and could instead contribute in more substantial ways to health disparities research. Jennifer plans to pursue a PhD in epidemiology so that she can design and direct research to eliminate health disparities, particularly as they impact Latinx populations.

Jennifer is a **superb critical thinker** with growing **skills in laboratory techniques, data management, and quantitative data analysis**. Building on the core epidemiology and biostatistics courses she completed in fall, which included training in SAS, Jennifer will take two intermediate methods courses this spring: *PH 759-Introduction to Regression for Understanding the Social Determinants of Health*, which requires applied multivariate data analysis using STATA, and *PH 761: Epidemiologic Field Methods*, which builds skills in the design and collection of surveys using Qualtrics, as well as data management and descriptive data analysis using SAS. In summer 2019, Jennifer was accepted into the competitive Diversity Summer Health-Related Research Education Program (DSHREP) at the Medical College of Wisconsin. This program provides a research internship for undergraduate students from backgrounds that are historically underrepresented in biomedical science. Through this program Jennifer learned to perform stem cell research, Western blotting, and real-time polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) testing.

In sum, Jennifer meets the eligibility requirements of the MHRT program, including Spanish language proficiency. She is enthusiastic about a long-term research career as an epidemiologist focused on the elimination of health disparities. She has a stellar academic record and relevant research experiences. Jennifer has performed laboratory assays; systematic searches; conceptual reviews, including evidence appraisal; will bring knowledge of programming in SAS and STATA; has conducted primary data collection in the field; and has outstanding scientific communication skills. She approaches her work with underserved populations with compassion, humility, and a commitment to excellence. I unequivocally recommend Jennifer for the NIMHD MHRT Program.

Sincerely,



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