



SCHOOL OF MEDICINE - DEPARTMENT OF BASIC SCIENCES

October 13, 2022

Selection Committee
Health Sciences Research Award
Intellectus Foundation

Re: Recommendation letter for applicant Sheila M. Valle-Cortés

Dear Selection Committee Members:

I am writing this letter of recommendation in support of my graduate student Sheila M. Valle Cortés, who is applying for an Intellectus Foundation Health Sciences Research Award. I have been acquainted with Sheila for about four years, first in the capacity of biochemistry teacher, and I currently have the immense pleasure to being her thesis advisor and research mentor. Sheila is working towards completion of her PhD degree, and she is conducting her thesis dissertation research in my laboratory, working on her own project focused on the characterization of clinically informative proteomic markers for the clinical management for prostate cancer. I am writing this letter of recommendation in full and sincere support of her application. I am very happy to support Sheila in this application since she is a stellar PhD student both in our Biomedical Sciences Graduate Program and as a graduate student in my laboratory.

I perceive Sheila as a very promising young woman full of career related aspirations and with an enormous talent and potential to achieve success in all her goals. She has a list of qualities that make her an outstanding graduate student in our institution. Ever since I met Sheila for the first time I have been impressed by her diligence, her elevated work ethics, her highly motivated, cooperative and enthusiastic attitude, and by her initiative and her commitment to her graduate studies and to her thesis work in my laboratory. Sheila initiated her work in my laboratory about three years ago (in her second year as a graduate student), in the area a prostate cancer proteomics. In that context Sheila took the task of initiating her own research project in cellular and molecular prostate cancer biology with diligence and enthusiasm. It is noticeable how she welcomed with energy all the challenges associated with her graduate studies and with a scientific career in general. Her first step consisted in reading a significant number of scientific articles in cancer research, and as a result of this experience she gained a deep and insightful understanding of the fundamental aspects and problems in modern cancer biology. At the same time, she was also being intensively trained in my laboratory in techniques routinely employed in cellular and molecular biology. She proved to be a fast learner, mastering a wide array of techniques in a few months. She is now a fully trained molecular biologist, and has complete expertise, both theoretical and practical, in most of the techniques routinely employed in molecular cancer research.

Last in October 2021, Sheila successfully defended her thesis proposal in front of her thesis committee, which makes her now officially a PhD candidate. The committee was very pleased with her

presentation, the goals of her thesis research project, and her ability to answer questions. Her thesis committee only recommended minimal revisions to her thesis proposal. She is currently working on her first manuscript that contains all the data that she has generated in my laboratory over the past couple of years (she managed to be productive, including remotely using bioinformatic tools, during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic). Some other significant achievements by her as a PhD student is that she has participated in several professional meetings and conferences since starting in our program (being either a poster or oral presenter), including the 2022 AACR Annual Meeting.

On a personal level, I find Sheila to be an extremely likeable, good natured and enthusiastic person with whom is very pleasant to interact. All of these are highly desired traits for a person who needs to collaborate in her work environment and work in teams with peers. She is also very organized and very helpful in the laboratory, being very enthusiastic in contributing to the training of MD and PhD rotation students and of undergraduate students from nearby universities. Last but no less important, I should comment that her ability for performing and balancing multiple tasks is also quite impressive. I remember that when she was taking her basic science courses (a quite demanding academic load), she still devoted a significant amount of time to her research rotation in my laboratory. Her enthusiasm for her initial research rotation in my laboratory was such that she decided afterwards to stay in my laboratory to pursue her dissertation project.

All of us faculty and investigators at PHSU who have been able to get well acquainted with Sheila hold her in very high esteem and we have high expectations of her. We all perceive her as one of our top trainees and we are all confident that she will be able to accomplish her research goals in a timely manner. We expect good things from her in the present as a PhD student, in the near future as a post-doctoral fellow, and in a more distant future as an independent researcher and academician. As a woman scientist belonging to an underrepresented minority group, we expect her to be a good role model for our more junior students and for society in general.

To sum up, I sincerely recommend Sheila M. Valle Cortés in her application for this Intellectus Foundation Health Sciences Research Award. Just by looking at her trajectory it is obvious that she has made biomedical sciences and cancer research both her passion and career path. This notion is reinforced by the enthusiasm, diligence, seriousness and responsibility with which she conducts her research. I see potential in her and anticipate many good things from her. If any additional information concerning this recommendation is needed, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



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