

1 April 2025

Dear Selection Committee

I am writing to nominate and highly recommend **Samuel (Sammy) Rodriguez Flecha** for the Administrative Professional Contribution Award for 2025. Sammy serves as the Team Mentoring Program (TMP) Director in the Office for Access & Opportunity (A&O) in the Division of Student Affairs. Shortly after re-organizing TMP to A&O, Sammy was hired as the only second director since TMP was established in 2007. As a new Director, he quickly became familiar with the objectives and operations of TMP and quickly established himself as an integral part of A&O and Student Affairs.

Sammy manages his director role with a thorough understanding and knowledge of supervisory principles and practices and can prioritize and handle multiple situations and projects simultaneously. Sammy is reliable, team-orientated, and has a deep belief in students' ability to succeed. He worked extremely collaboratively during the initial re-organization and transition; set up procedures and protocols to build efficiencies, built on his working knowledge of Washington State University (WSU) systems and platforms, sought out new external funding streams, and established effective and cooperative working relationships across campus. Colleagues often comment on how willing he is to volunteer his time and talent and how quickly he responds to requests. His reliability, teamwork, high expectations, and belief in students' ability to succeed speak well of his caliber as a professional. He has a strong foundation through his leadership ability that he continues to build on with strategic relationships with faculty and staff and by expanding university and industry networks to gain support for TMP retention efforts and program objectives.

With expected steady growth in demand in STEM and health fields, programs such as TMP play a critical role in meeting workforce imperatives. Over the years, this signature program at WSU has offered a unique aspect and impact at the university in alignment with WSU's education, research, community service, and land-grant mission and important contributions to the world of work. TMP's multi-layer approach includes peer mentors, faculty mentors, and industry partners. This program, which has been nationally recognized, continues to be a shining example of retention efforts for hundreds of minoritized students Cougs in STEM and pre-health fields. TMP contributes to institutional efforts to increase retention and graduation rates of historically marginalized and underserved students and prepares them to enter and succeed in the workforce and/or graduate studies to benefit the communities and increase the competitiveness of the state of Washington, the Pacific Northwest, and the nation. Sammy constantly works towards developing and enhancing services for mentees, leading efforts to refine mentor and mentee learning outcomes and assessment tools and reaching new levels of excellence in mentor selection, training, and processes.

WSU offers a unique developmental experience for students of all backgrounds, but TMP is uniquely positioned within the university to offer specific services to a targeted group of students in STEM committed to diversity, with encouraging results. For example, during the 2023-2024 academic year, TMP recruited 26 student mentors (juniors and above) and served 418 student

mentees (primarily 2nd year and new transfer students) from four partnering colleges—College of Arts & Sciences; College of Agricultural, Human, & Natural Resource Sciences; College of Veterinary Medicine; and the Voiland College of Engineering & Architecture. One important goal of the program is to connect students to people and resources. Many of TMP students are the first in their families to pursue higher education and are unfamiliar with how to navigate college, interact with faculty, or benefit from available services.

As one student said, *“Being underrepresented in STEM can be challenging. Having someone to talk to who has gone through similar things and can give you applicable advice and support is invaluable.” A mentee talking about the principle of Encouraging Community.”*

Or as a peer mentor shared how mentoring is a highlight in their academic career,

“Being a TMP mentor has been an incredibly fulfilling experience. It’s more than just guiding mentees through their academic journey; it’s about fostering a supportive community where everyone feels valued and empowered. Witnessing mentees grow, both academically and personally, as they navigate challenges and seize opportunities has been truly rewarding. Through TMP I’ve not only been able to share knowledge and experiences but also learn from the diverse perspectives and backgrounds of mentees. It’s a privilege to be part of their journey and contribute to their success in STEM and beyond.”

Everything Sammy executes on behalf of the TMP, he does so with professionalism, thoroughness, and a deep understanding of the student population served in the program. Sammy is reliable, and teamwork-orientated, is someone that exercises great diplomacy, and has a deep belief in students' ability to succeed. This award seeks to recognize employees who have gone above and beyond job responsibilities including but not limited to productivity, innovative problem-solving positive working relationships, and exceptional university services. Over the last five years, Sammy has exemplified all these characteristics and has made huge contributions not only to TMP and A&O since 2019 but to WSU since 2006.

Sammy’s commitment to hard work and upholding the success of TMP has positioned the program to move forward in significant ways at WSU. Sammy makes sure not to just deliver high-quality student support services to participating students, but to also make improvements each year to better meet student needs. He is an excellent implementer and can anticipate, prepare for, and manage all kinds of circumstances. He can anticipate staff challenges, continue to build on working knowledge of systems such as OBIEE, Workday, and Financial Aid; set aside time to do more research; and utilize student data and analysis to design, develop, and enhance services for mentees.

I know there will be many fine candidates to consider but for the reasons mentioned above, I feel Sammy is a strong candidate for this year and I give my highest recommendation. I commend and value his competence and dedication to TMP, A&O and WSU.

Respectfully submitted,



Lucila Loera
Executive Director