

October 27, 2021

Review Committee
FAHE Foundation for the Advancement of Health Education
Dr. Mary K Beyrer Graduate Student Scholarship

Re: Elena Luna application for Dr. Mary K. Beyrer Graduate Student Scholarship

Dear Review Committee:

It is my pleasure to write on behalf of Ms. Elena Luna, MPH, in support of her application for the FAHE Dr. Mary K Beyrer Graduate Student Scholarship. I currently serve as Ms. Luna's academic advisor for Doctor of Public Health degree that she is pursuing at the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth) School of Public Health in Austin, Texas. I have known Ms. Luna for approximately three years and have had the pleasure of having Ms. Luna in three of my courses during this past academic year (2018-19): PH1113 Advanced Methods for Planning and Implementing Health Promotion Programs; PH1123 Community Health Promotion Theory & Practice, and PH1433 Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences Seminar. I have also supervised Ms. Luna with two community-based health research projects: *Stronger Austin Evaluation*- a study aimed at increasing access and availability of health and fitness programming (e.g., Zumba) in communities experiencing economic disadvantage in the Austin area, and *the Evaluation of the Effects of the Green School Project: A Pilot Study*, a study aimed at assessing the effects of school yard nature-based improvements on children's physical activity and health.

Ms. Luna has been an exceptional graduate student who has demonstrated great initiative, passion and competence for contributing to individual-level and community-level health promotion, with a specific focus on communities experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage. Ms. Luna began her doctoral studies in fall 2018 and has proven to be a highly competent and hardworking graduate student based on my experience with her in three of my courses described above. For each of my courses, she has set herself apart from other students based on her active participation in class, her leadership with our small group sessions, her high competence in applying the community health promotion planning methods taught in my classes in her exams, written reflections and in NIH-style health proposal assignments, and her self-initiative to pursue community-based research and practice opportunities (see below). She received an "A" in each of my courses, and has actively contributed to our co-learning environment among her student colleagues. I can confirm that Ms. Luna has a **3.769 GPA** and has completed 68 hours in her graduate program.

Beyond her high performance with graduate school classes, Ms. Luna has taken an active role in pursuing additional research and practice learning opportunities, which include serving as a research assistant with my *Stronger Austin Evaluation* project, an evaluation of an initiative aimed at increasing access and availability of health and fitness programming in low-income neighborhoods in Austin, as well as the *Evaluation of the Green School Project*, for which Ms. Luna served as the principal investigator. The Green School Project aims to increase nature-based enhancements to the outdoor learning environment of elementary school students that is being led by the City of Austin/Austin Parks and Recreation Department.

Ms. Luna has excelled with her work on both of these community-based projects, which has included experience with data collection, development and implementation of evaluation measures, data analysis, and co-authoring of three scientific conference abstracts.

Currently, Ms. Luna is conducting her dissertation research, which focuses on assessing the barriers and facilitating factors for leisure-time physical activity engagement among Latinx adults living in central Texas. In addition to her dissertation research, Ms. Luna has excelled with her role as a teaching assistant at our UTHHealth School of Public Health, which includes serving as a teaching assistant for an advanced methods in health promotion planning course and a health promotion theory course, which are both core classes for our graduate program in health promotion and health education.

Given Ms. Luna's multiple strengths related to her current graduate studies; excellent initiative, passion and contributions to community-based health efforts for economically disadvantaged communities; and career goals of continuing to develop her research, practice and leadership skills to reduce health disparities for her Latino community as well as other economically underserved communities, I am delighted to highly recommend her for consideration of the Dr. Mary K Beyrer Graduate Student Scholarship.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of Ms. Luna, and please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Andrew E. Springer, DrPH
Associate Professor of Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences (tenured)
UTHealth School of Public Health-Austin
Andrew.e.springer@uth.tmc.edu
(512)391-2523