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Marcie Lazzari, Ph.D., M.S.W.  
Interim Co-Director School of Social Work and Criminal Justice  
University of Washington-Tacoma  
Box 358425 1900 Commerce St.  
Tacoma, WA 98402

Re: Dr. Gillian Marshall

Dear Dr. Lazzari:

It is with pleasure that I write this evaluation of **Dr. Gillian L. Marshall** who is being considered for Promotion to Associate Professor with Tenure in the School of Social Work and Criminal Justice at the University of Washington-Tacoma. Redacted pursuant to Court Order

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we have not collaborated on any research projects, publications, or professional presentations. I am familiar with her areas of research and feel competent to write this letter of evaluation. I have reviewed Dr. Marshall's Promotion Statement, CV and representative publications, in addition to the accompanying School of Social Work and Criminal Justice document: Policy Guidelines for Tenure and Promotion. As directed in your letter, I did not address Dr. Marshall's teaching and service record as part of my assessment. My evaluation focuses on the quality and significance of Dr. Marshall's work, her scholarly contributions with respect to originality, impact, and significance of her work to the field of Social Work and her standing in relation to scholars in her field who are at comparable rank and position in their careers.

### **Research and Scholarship Overview**

Dr. Marshall's portfolio represents an impressive program of research and scholarship that is significant in its scope, complexity, and practical relevance. Substantively, her research brings together scholarly traditions in the areas of racial and ethnic physical and mental health disparities, stress and coping processes, social support and connections, and cumulative advantage/disadvantage perspective with the aim of understanding the health and well-being of racial and ethnic older adults. Her research embodies a strong interdisciplinary approach that is informed by intellectual and practice traditions from social work, gerontology, and public health. Her use of diverse conceptual and theoretical contributions as noted above provides a rich foundation for her work.

Dr. Marshall's program of research is noteworthy for highlighting personal, interpersonal, and structural factors that collectively influence health and well-being. Her focus on older Black adults is especially appropriate given their heightened and lifelong exposures to environmental circumstances and psychosocial stressors (e.g., higher rates of poverty, discrimination, reduced access to care) that are significant risks for poor physical and mental health outcomes. Her research on socioeconomic status and health is innovative in incorporating alternative measures

such as financial hardship and debt (e.g., medical debt, foreclosure risk, asset loss). These more proximal and direct measures of financial stressors have more immediate relevance and salience for respondents than traditional measures such as income and occupational status and provide a more in-depth assessment of the impact of financial stress on the health and well-being of diverse population subgroups. Her focus on financial stressors and their various manifestations is important in demonstrating the diverse ways that they contribute to poorer health profiles among racial and ethnic minority and impoverished elders.

The incorporation of cumulative advantage/disadvantage theory in her work provides an explicit life course perspective that foregrounds how these processes occur and intensify over time in ways that disadvantages harm and advantages bolster health. Her work also reflects a strength-based approach in noting the importance of social support networks (family, church, peers) that are acknowledged resources for coping with life stressors. Finally, Dr. Marshall's research embodies an explicit focus on understanding how various pathways and mechanisms work in tandem and comprise socially determined patterns of exposures, interactions, and barriers that influence the physical and mental health status of older adults.

### **Research Scope and Scholarly Contributions**

Dr. Marshall's research program addresses persistent racial/ethnic health disparities for older adults. Her work is broad in scope and incorporates multiple areas and levels of focus (i.e., biological, psychosocial, structural, and health services factors) to specify relevant etiological pathways for physical and mental health outcomes. This coordinated program of research focuses on issues that are integral to understanding disparities/inequities in physical and mental health outcomes in the U.S., as well as the impact of accumulated advantages/disadvantages associated with prior physical and mental health status, social circumstances, and psychosocial risk factors across the life course.

Dr. Marshall's research is significant in several respects. First, her work demonstrates the scientific value and utility of incorporating a life course framework in investigating the physical and mental health of older adults who are members of socially disadvantaged groups. Life course concepts such as historical events, social change and cumulative advantage and disadvantage are useful in augmenting a predominant focus in health promotion on the impact of individual risk behaviors on the health of older populations. Her work is important in highlighting the cumulative impact of early and mid- life circumstances and events on status in older age. Second, Dr. Marshall's work contextualizes individual health risk behaviors in terms of psychosocial stressors and prior life events and circumstances. Doing so provides an enhanced understanding of the causal pathways that link social circumstances, personal behaviors, and health outcomes. Third, Dr. Marshall's research is distinctive from typical research on health disparities in that her work seeks to understand both proximal and distal factors associated with adverse health outcomes and identify the causal pathways that link behavioral, social, and structural determinants of health. Doing so, effectively re-conceptualizes health disparities as health *inequities* (i.e., avoidable and unjust inequalities) and underscores the systemic and structural features and circumstances that produce and maintain poor health and adverse health outcomes among socially disadvantaged groups.

### **Significance and Impact**

Dr. Marshall's work has been supported by external funding in the form of a Mentored Research Scientist Career Development Award (K01) from the National Institute on Aging in support of

her research. Her project examining race/ethnicity and financial strain trajectories in cognitive decline positions her at the forefront of investigations of cognitive health among racial and ethnic minority populations. This award provides her opportunities to further develop her skill set and scholarly orientations/approaches in the areas of health services methods and statistics, aging and stress, and behavioral economics. It is particularly noteworthy that she stands out as one of few scholars from a school of social work to be awarded a K Award. In addition, she has been accorded the distinction of being selected an Early Career Reviewer for the Social Sciences and Population Study Section of the National Institute on Aging.

Dr. Marshall embodies a professional identity as a social worker who functions across social work, gerontology, and public health in investigating the physical and mental health of racial and ethnic minority aging using a transdisciplinary lens. She is successfully engaged in strong and productive research collaborations that embody a transdisciplinary perspective and are appropriate for the complex and multi-level research questions that she investigates. These research collaborations incorporate a *team science* approach which is reflective of the combined perspectives, methods and resources needed to address health outcomes that are influenced by a complex and dynamic array of biological, psychosocial and structural factors. She has sustained collaborative partnerships that have resulted in an impressive body of research studies and demonstrate the important and unique contributions she makes to these efforts.

Dr. Marshall's research is published in high visibility and impactful journals that underscore its broad relevance to health profession specialties (e.g., gerontology and psychiatry), population science (e.g., epidemiology, prevention), and diverse practice focus areas and groups (e.g., aging, mental health). Her contributions as a social work researcher brings greater visibility of social work perspectives in understanding the factors contributing to adverse health outcomes typically absent from clinical health professions. Social work's emphasis on social ecological perspectives provides a broader understanding of the interdependence of social actors and social systems. Further, in contrast to deficit-based perspectives, she brings a social work framework that highlights the importance of strength-based strategies that build on individual, family and community resources and assets. Her efforts make important contributions to addressing persistent limitations in research that is still largely acontextual and fails to consider aging with a life course framework within relevant social, community and health service contexts.

Dr. Marshall has been successful in the dissemination of her research through her published works. She demonstrates scholarly and intellectual leadership as senior author on published articles appearing in leading journals. Her research is highly interdisciplinary as evidenced by the journals in which she has published. Her body of published work appears in several well-regarded journals that span disciplines and practice fields including *Health and Social Work, Aging and Mental Health, Social Work, Annals of Epidemiology, Journal of Public Health Research, Medicine, and Social Psychiatry*. Articles provided in her dossier reflect her unique perspective and the quality and reach of her work. In particular, Marshall et al. (2020) in *Aging and Mental Health* is especially relevant and timely in examining relationships between financial hardship (difficulty paying bills) and medical debt and reports of depressive symptoms and anxiety among older adults in the Health and Retirement Study. This article is especially timely given ongoing discussions concerning non-medical social needs as drivers of health status and outcomes ([Wortman et al., 2020](#)). Marshall's related work (e.g., Marshall et al., 2019, Marshall & Seely-Tucker, 2018) highlights the importance of understanding how financial difficulties are manifested in different domains (e.g., food insecurity, bill delinquency, medical debt, medication

needs), among subgroups of older adults who differ in relation to health behaviors and health status, and their relevance for diverse physical and mental health outcomes (Marshall et al., 2017). Her work as an interdisciplinary scholar and researcher makes important contributions to evolving trans-disciplinary perspectives and multi-level and contextually-informed research and practice which are hallmarks of the field of social work.

### Summary

Dr. Marshall's work utilizes diverse perspectives and methodological tools in addressing complex and dynamic processes associated with health and well-being among older racial/ethnic adults. She has developed an important line of investigation that makes significant contributions in understanding the impact of biological, psychosocial, and structural factors on health. Her research has achieved broad dissemination to diverse disciplinary and professional audiences, ensuring greater reach and recognition of the relevance of Social Work perspectives and frameworks. She is productively involved in research projects that demonstrate her intellectual leadership as well as her contributions as a collaborative team member. Her record of knowledge development and dissemination in the form of journal articles, book chapters, and referred presentations at professional conferences reflects her steady productivity and contributions to several areas of scientific inquiry and practice.

After reviewing the materials submitted for consideration, I believe that her record of scholarship and research reflect an excellent set of accomplishments and an impressive professional portfolio. Her success with respect to federal funding for her work (Mentored Research Scientist Career Development Award) and selection as an early career reviewer by the National Institute on Aging is acknowledgement by her peers of the value and scientific merit of her research. She has outlined several directions for future research that capitalize on her findings in the areas of stressful events, social support and connectedness, and expansion in domains of financial hardship that are poised to make further contributions to scholarship in these areas. In sum, based on these demonstrated achievements, I believe she compares extremely favorably to social work faculty of comparable rank and career position who are under consideration for promotion and tenure. I support without reservation **Dr. Gillian L. Marshall's** promotion to Associate Professor with Tenure in the School of Social Work and Criminal Justice at the University of Washington-Tacoma.

Thank you for the opportunity to assist in this important evaluation process. Please contact me should you have additional questions.

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