


Thelma L. Harding



March 14, 2025

Dear Search Committee:

I first met Dr. Jordán Conde when she was a master's student at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa. I will refer to Dr. Jordan Conde as Zayira from here on. At the time of our meeting I served in the role of assistant to the graduate dean for recruitment and retention in Iowa State's Graduate College, specifically of underrepresented students wishing to pursue masters and doctoral degrees. Zayira's swift progress through her studies while raising a family of five as head of household and volunteering to assist with Graduate College student activities was truly admirable. We were all extremely impressed with her persistence, commitment, and love for her family and her studies.

I decided to hire Zayira as a graduate assistant for the Ronald E. McNair's Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program, which prepares first generation and underrepresented college juniors and seniors for entry to graduate school and the achievement of the doctoral degree. I was Zayira's supervisor. Her work cannot be otherwise described than that of excellence. Her passion for assisting the students we served was evidently ignited by her own path. She demonstrated that she wanted to be instrumental in providing the opportunities she herself had been blessed with to others.

Three years after earning her PhD, I recruited Zayira back to the Graduate College and to the McNair Program as Assistant Director. She contributed to creating assessments and curricula that resulted in multiple positive impacts for the program in general and its participants, many of whom have earned PhDs and are employed throughout the country, thanks to Zayira's contributions.

With time, I can say that Zayira became a friend and I became a part of her family. I have known her for more than twenty years in her different roles at Iowa State. Zayira's professional path is a reflection of her tenacity and commitment to excellence. The University of Puerto Rico and its community will have in Zayira an evangelizer, an advocate, a wholesome human being committed to serving others and helping provide opportunities to others who like her, may not have been looked at as the promising stars they turned out to be. Zayira is a definite asset, a firm leader who listens and always expects the best from herself and others. An advocate for the community and a professional and academician who actively seeks fairness and inclusivity in every role she takes on.

I encourage you to consider Zayira's exceptional career and life story in your search for a leader. She is more than prepared to take on this role.

Sincerely,

Thelma Harding

Thelma L. Harding (Retired from Iowa State University, April 2024)

Served in the following roles:

Director, Graduate Enrollment Management

Director, Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program

Assistant to the Graduate Dean for Recruitment and Retention