



April 29, 2022

Dear Resilience and Compassion SEED Grant Committee,

I am writing this letter in support of the Critical Conversations Collective (CCC), a doctoral student group dedicated to justice and mentorship for Students of Color. I have known several members of the CCC since they took my graduate seminar three years ago and been members of the *Race, Theory, & Design Lab*, which I direct in the College of Education. I believe the work of the CCC is consistent with the university's mission to uphold equity and justice in our community and I strongly support their grant proposal.

The CCC is a group that has cultivated kindness, compassion, and gratitude towards each other and has leveraged their connectedness to advance their own doctoral work and contribute to the UW community. For example, earlier this year, CCC were invited by the College of Education to share about their efforts during one of our monthly faculty meetings. They spoke about the need for more graduate student spaces that allow for criticality, connection, and support, while noting that the burden shouldn't solely fall on graduate students to cultivate these spaces. Both during and afterwards, multiple faculty members reported how impactful their presentation was; I am hopeful it will inspire stronger mentorship of Students of Color in our College in the future. The CCC modeled for us what it looks like to advocate for Black, Brown, and Indigenous graduate student, as well as to extend compassion and gratitude towards each other and ourselves.

The CCC group has also identified the need for mentoring and peer-to-peer spaces within the College. They designed programming that centered their own intersectional identities to promote justice-centered work at UW and the wider Seattle community through decolonial and abolitionist means. As I have mentored several CCC members, I have witnessed their ability to support one both professionally and personally outside their PhD work.

Lastly, I want to emphasize the role of collaboration in their work. These students designed the CCC space to be centered around learning from community members *outside* academia, as a mechanism to facilitate dialogue and enhance and/or challenge their own scholarship to build a more holistic educational experience. Part of the grant will be used to invite community members whose work focuses on climate justice. Not only does this complicate the work they are already doing with Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities, it also allows them the time and space to develop skills to build out their repertoire of holistic advocacy.

As someone who has mentored many doctoral students, I strongly believe that groups like the CCC are vital to the success of Students of Color at UW. By funding their proposal, the university would be sending a strong message that it supports such student-led efforts, which are at the forefront of vital scholarship advancing equity and justice both on and beyond the UW campus.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Niral Shah', with a stylized, cursive script.

Niral Shah

Associate Professor, Learning Sciences & Human Development
College of Education