



May 19, 2014

Re: Seth Panitch for Full Professor

Dear External Evaluator:

I completely support Seth Panitch for Full Professor. As previous Coordinator of the Alabama-Cuba Initiative for almost 12 years, I have had the unique pleasure in assisting Professor Panitch in developing creative activity for the Cuba Initiative.

Professor Panitch has crossed all messy political boundaries to produce art. I am sure other support letters will focus on Professor Panitch's superior skill in his art. While, it's true that his ability has raised the level of theater production at The University of Alabama to nothing short of professional, I would like to focus on the outcomes of his excellence as seen through the lens of someone trying to establish educational and cultural ties with a country that has been closed off to such activities for decades.

Over the 11 years of the Cuba Initiative, many faculty have succeeded in establishing solid scholarly ties with Cuba. For those disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, those ties have been with the University of Havana and have been easier to establish because of the more traditional nature of this university. However, as most know, nothing in Cuba is easy. The higher education system in Cuba is organized more like the Soviet Union. From a practical perspective, this means that many disciplines are studied at institutes, centers, or government agencies. Tracking down exactly who is in charge of what discipline has been very difficult.

When faced with the opportunity of establishing ties with Cuba, Professor Panitch did not hesitate to seek out the institute and organization that controlled theater education in Cuba. His quest was made even more difficult because he had to navigate two entities. Cuban professionals are skeptical because they want to know that they are not being used for microscopic inquiry. Rather, they want a sincere appreciation of their talent. From the beginning they knew Professor Panitch was sincere. Professor Panitch was given an opportunity to teach and perform. His superior talent is quite simply what opened the door. They knew he was "for real." His talent at his art and his exceptional teaching style opened doors for him and The University of Alabama's Cuba Initiative.

Professor Panitch has subsequently been able to take numerous undergraduate and graduate students to perform and train in Cuba. He has created a program of study unlike any other in the country, providing his students the unique opportunity to work side by side with professional Cuban actors on Cuban stages throughout Havana. He has directed well-received productions of both Shakespeare and contemporary American playwrights in Cuba and in the U.S. while developing this Cuban-American theatre company. He was able to bring an unprecedented number of Cubans to study with UA students in a production of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream." The project has been on-going and unceasing.

Last year's production of *Alceste Ascending* has been the highlight of this project between these two countries. Written by Professor Panitch and performed by both Cuban and American artists, this play was performed in Tuscaloosa, New York City, and Havana. In all three locations, it received rave reviews.

I can honestly say that Professor Panitch's work with Cuban theater has been a cornerstone of our entire Initiative. And ... the cornerstone of his work in Cuba is superior talent. Talent and art have a language all their own and can be appreciated across all cultural and political views. This is what Professor Panitch has done for both his students and The University of Alabama.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carmen Burkhalter". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Carmen Burkhalter
Professor
College of Arts and Sciences