31 January 2017

Data Science for Public Good (DSPG) Fellowship Program
Social and Decisions Analytics Laboratory
Virginia Tech

To Whom It May Concern:

I write this letter with great enthusiasm to recommend Ms. Lata Kodali for the Data Science for Public Good (DSPG) Fellowship Program. She is a talented, motivated, and excellent collaborator/student. Both she and the program would benefit from her becoming a fellow.

Ms. Kodali is a second year graduate student in Statistics at Virginia Tech (VT), and this year, we opted to work together. That is, I am now her Ph.D. advisor. I met Ms. Kodali 1.5 years ago, during her first semester at VT when she took my class on probability theory. She received an A for the course. Based on her performance, questions, and interactions with others, I think that she is both a strong and kind student, who wants both herself and her classmates to succeed.
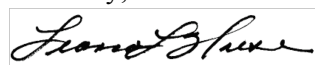
As a graduate student in statistics, she has expertise that she can bring to multidisciplinary working groups, regardless of the research question. She has taken courses and completed projects in areas relevant for analytics, including statistical inference, experimental design, Bayesian statistics, and statistical computation. She is a strong programmer in R and a focused problem solver. Also, the project on which she works with me has given her experience managing messy, qualitative text data. Currently, she is developing/using automated methods for assessing text responses from study subjects.

The project on which we are working includes technical research in developing useful interactive data visualizations for analysts and pedagogical research in how our visualization technology may improve student learning. Currently, we are focusing on the pedagogical research questions, as we just completed a large experiment that required collecting data from 250 students four times over the span of one month. Ms. Kodali lead the initiative. She designed the experiment, created the data collecting tools (e.g., surveys), and implemented the experiment. Now, she is managing and analyzing the data.

Not many students are interested in having two research agendas. However, Ms. Kodali has a desire to bring research to practice, and improving pedagogy is one way to do so. That said, she is still contemplating her dissertation topic. Although, we are working together, she is not sure that the ideas for the technical side of her potential research agenda interest her. We are using this year to see.

To conclude, I think that Ms. Lata Kodali will make a positive, noticeable difference wherever she goes. Her drive, intellect, and personality are outstanding. Though deserved, she is grateful for the opportunities she is provided and she will be an excellent fellow, if selected. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me by either phone or email. My contact information is above.

Sincerely,

Leanna L. House
Enclosures (0)

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