

Prof. Abdeslam Boularias  
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Regarding: NASA Space Technology Research Fellowship

November 3, 2016

Dear Fellowship Committee,

It is my pleasure to endorse and recommend this very bright and gifted Rutgers University PhD student, Colin Rennie, for his exceeding eligibility for the NASA Space Technology Research Fellowship.

When I began as Assistant Professor at Rutgers in Summer of 2015, Colin was one of the first students I met. Since that time, I've had the opportunity and great pleasure of working closely with Colin in his role as Teaching Assistant for my "Introduction to Artificial Intelligence" course last fall, where he proved himself to be diligent, reliable, hard-working, and a good communicator in his interactions with students. Colin was such an exceptional help in this course that I personally requested to have him as the TA for my graduate Seminar in Robotic Learning the following semester. Since then I've had the opportunity to work with him on a number of research efforts and software development projects, including large-scale and long-duration projects such as our efforts with building a system to compete in the Amazon Picking Challenge. Through these experiences I've come to believe his potential as both an engineer and a young researcher to be substantial.

One of the most prominent qualities that Colin displays throughout his work, whether he is tutoring students for a class or working on his research, is a sense of maturity. In my classes he was tasked with teaching the material to students of varying age groups and incoming skill levels. He did so with a level of patience and empathy that, in my opinion, is largely uncommon in graduate studies. This is something that students and I both appreciated about having Colin around.

Colin is extremely dutiful when it comes to his own obligations. Aside from balancing a demanding graduate-level research agenda, classes, and TA duties, I've never known him to be either late or unprepared for a meeting. He has always researched the topics to be discussed and is ready to add his perspective to the discussion. Colin shows up at lab every morning, and often times stays well into the night – whether meeting a deadline or working on his own research.

Beyond facilitating productive discussion, Colin strikes me as the type of person who is genuinely excited to take on new efforts and extend his current research efforts in new directions. The idea of learning-by-experimenting is not lost on him, and he welcomes opportunities to broaden his knowledge base through in-depth experience with new and different ideas and experiences.

Overall I would say that Colin's qualities as an individual qualify him as a very well-rounded person, while his dedication to and the fulfillment he seems to get out of his own research and studies make him a very promising researcher.

Based on my numerous experiences with him over the past year and a half and for the reasons outlined above, I am able to wholeheartedly and without hesitation recommend Colin Rennie for this award. Colin is very bright and capable, enthusiastic about what he's doing, and enjoyable to work with. He would be an asset to any research project.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Abdeslam Boularias". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Prof. Abdeslam Boularias