Stanford University

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Dear ACM Creativity and Cognition Graduate Student Symposium Evaluation Committee,

I am writing to express my enthusiastic support of Lydia Chilton attending the Graduate Student Symposium at the 2015 Creativity and Cognition Conference. Lydia is my most senior graduate student and she has a record full of groundbreaking accomplishment and top research publications. She and her collaborators at MIT introduced crowdsourcing as a tool in HCI eight years ago, and it has exploded in popularity ever since. Every project she has done has pushed the limits of how to break complex problems into modular pieces that the crowd can work on independently. Lydia is graduating in September and plans to go on the academic job market in the fall. I expect Lydia secure a faculty position at a top 10 CS department.

Many other crowdsourcing projects focus on tasks that are trivial to decompose such as labeling 1000 images by 1000 different people. In contrast, Lydia crowdsources problems that need a global understanding of all the data, such as creating a taxonomy of travel photos, or pieces of career advice that organizes them into themes with appropriate human readable labels for easy navigation. Additionally, she is not content to work on toy problems. She has deployed her tools to two top tier conferences to help organize their accepted papers (in the 100s) into sessions that shaped the conference program. Many of the hard problems she chooses to work on have solutions that are often subjective in nature and thus hard for computers, or even humans, to solve. Her current and final project is to decompose the process of generating humor by treating it as a search problem over the space of simple creative tasks that computers cannot do but humans find easy such as generating an exaggeration or giving a reason why elitism is wrong.

Decomposing and crowdsourcing a creative task, such as generating humor, is clearly a challenging problem. This research weaves together insights from the literature on creativity and brainstorming, the literature on problem solving such as design thinking and particularly design patterns, and the tradition in artificial intelligence to pose problems as search problems. I think her work and her ability to articulate her methodology will spark much interest in the Graduate Student Symposium. Likewise, she will benefit greatly from being a part of the growing community in computer science surrounding the study of creativity and cognition.

Sincerely,

Professor James A. Landay

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James Landay earned his PhD in Computer Science from Carnegie Mellon University in 1996. He is currently a Professor of Computer Science at Stanford University. Prior to joining Stanford, he was a Professor in Information Science at Cornell Tech in New York City for one year and a Professor of Computer Science and Engineering at the University of Washington for 10 years. From 2003-2006, he also served as the Director of Intel Labs Seattle, a leading research laboratory with twenty researchers investigating various aspects of ubiquitous computing. Before that, he was a tenured Associate Professor of Computer Science at the University of California at Berkeley. In these roles, he has had the opportunity to closely evaluate a large number of researchers in computer science, human-computer interaction (HCI), design, and ubiquitous computing (Ubicomp). Graduate students and postdocs he has worked with have gone on to faculty/research positions at Stanford (2), CMU, UW, UCSD, Michigan, Maryland, Microsoft Research, and Google Research, as well as to other positions in industry and academia. He has been recognized as a leader in the field by his election to the ACM SIGCHI Academy in 2011.

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