To whom it may concern,

I am writing in support of the organizing team of the 2019 McGill Physics Hackathon for the award for Equity & Community Building. Being my first hackathon, the experience was not only a pleasant introduction into competitive programming, but also provided valuable insight into what a well-organized competition that upheld an inclusive and cooperative environment would look like.

After failing my grade 10 physics test, I was raised to believe that physics was meant for the more intellectually gifted of the society. I held this belief until my final year of high school, where I decided to enrol in grade 12 physics to challenge this flawed view. Immediately, I fell in love with the subject and decided to undergo its study at the university level. However, I found that taking this step from high school to university physics was daunting. Naturally, I felt the same way upon the application for the McGill Physics Hackathon as well.

Despite that, reading that one need not have a strong background in physics or programming (a background which I did not have) was comforting. With only a first semester of first year knowledge of physics, I knew I was entering the competition with little applicable skills other than a burning interest in the subject. Nonetheless, on the day of the Hackathon, the intellectually inclusive environment promoted by the competition remedied my doubts immediately. Amongst the participants were individuals from diverse backgrounds, from life sciences to mathematics, from high school to graduate school, regardless of creed or colour, together in pursuit of tackling physics problems. All in all, it became apparent that the hackathon was an environment where people of any intellectual background would not feel isolated.

Naturally, many technical issues would be faced throughout the competition. With my high school never having a class in computer science, the mentors and workshops available for the hackathon were immensely valuable throughout the competition. Being the only physics hackathon in Canada, I am confident in saying that as a student with already constrained financial means, without the fortune of being provided the travel award and fee waiver, it is likely that I would have never pursued my passion for physics at a competition level, let alone a physics hackathon.

As an undergraduate at U of T, my experience at the hackathon made me perceive McGill’s department of physics in a greater light. It became clear through the well-organized and thought out planning of the competition, that the department endeavours to create an inclusive environment for all its students, culturally, intellectually, and financially. It can only be concluded that other university physics departments should follow suit in the creation of such an inclusive environment as well.

Sincerely,

Juan Yi Loke