

Memo:

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To: CUES Selection Committee

From: Barbara W. Citera
Associate Dean



Date: April 17, 2019

I am writing to provide my support for Dr. Ryan Straight's application as a CUES Distinguished Fellow. Dr. Straight has been working in recent years at building community and improving the experiences of students at our distance and online campuses. This CUES award would allow him to expand considerably on this work and possibly lay the groundwork for future, broader community-building ventures at the institution.

In his time at the university, Dr. Straight has emerged as an innovative and caring teacher, always looking for new and interesting ways of improving instruction and bringing students together. This is no small task at the UA South campus, as instructing entirely online often takes considerably more effort than doing so in a traditional brick-and-mortar classroom. Dr. Straight has also collaborated with faculty other disciplines, including Cyber Operations, Organizational Leadership and English, in an attempt to bring our students together, despite their disparate programs. The project Dr. Straight is proposing would provide him with considerable leverage and opportunity to do better and bigger what he already does well at a smaller scale.

The ability to develop and sustain a culture of learning as a community (and vice versa) is terribly important at UASouth as an academic unit and branch campus of the University of Arizona, is a 2+2 degree institution and serves transfer students in rural Arizona. As such, our students are only typically with us for two years. Dr. Straight's project would give us a much greater ability for these students to 'hit the ground running,' as it were, in terms of feeling a sense of belonging and the support, both emotional and scholastic, that it brings. Being at the forefront of this kind of experiential innovation is a thrilling prospect for.

Dr. Straight is on an 80% teaching, which translates into teaching 4 courses per semester, 20% service contract, leaving very little time to address his research interests and grand challenges like this on top of his normal contractual duties. As such, I am willing to support this project with one course release for the academic year.

Finally, it is an exciting proposition that our students, which consist of 54% first-in-family college, 30% military affiliated, and 39% Hispanic students, and are located at the branch campus and distance locations, as well as through Arizona Online, could have a single, familiar, persistent place to call home, albeit a digital one. If our goal is to provide our students with a consistently top-quality education regardless of program or location, what Dr. Straight is proposing is certainly a way to achieve this. Coupled with his verve for teaching, love of his students, and willingness to go above and beyond what is simply required and reach for what could be, I fully support his application for the CUES Distinguished Fellowship.

