CUES Distinguished Fellowship Nomination

Project Proposal

Dr. Ryan Straight (ryanstraight@email.arizona.edu)
Assistant Professor, Educational Technology

Project Proposal

As a CUES Distinguished Fellow, I propose to further develop and expand a small-scale project that I have led over the past three years: the implementation of a ubiquitous online collaboration tool (Slack) as a collaborative community and instructional hub. (See the Catalyst grant referenced below.) As both local and national trends reveal rapid growth in online course enrollment[1], the Grand Challenge this proposal addresses is the creation and development of community among students, faculty, and staff, with the goal of fostering positive and productive working relationships, as well as promoting inquiry, motivation to learn, collaboration, and engagement in virtual learning environments. Given the rapid shift from traditional to blended and fully online learning environments, the obligation to address, develop, and foster community and discourse in virtual spaces is of paramount importance (Benade, 2015). One of the most difficult aspects of teaching and learning online is the relative lack of community and sense of belonging felt by students and instructors, alike (Yuan & Kim, 2014). Two decades into the 21st century, many online learning programs continue to confuse remote learning with isolated learning, creating an experience oddly reminiscent of the correspondence schools of the last century. With ever increasing demand for and enrollment in online programs, there is no better time than the present to move beyond simply providing quality content to learners, into designing collaborative learning spaces for all members of the learning community – students, faculty, and staff alike – exploiting the potential of online environments to facilitate mutual inquiry, dialogue, and the creation of knowledge through constructive social processes.

Students don't choose a program based on the learning management system they will use or the instructional design method followed by their instructor. Instead, they trust their instructors to be experts, who will ensure that they will have the opportunity to learn effectively and efficiently in an authentic and engaging online environment. That said, absent dialogue, collaboration, and community, the quality of online learning suffers, leaving students with a dissatisfying and ultimately inadequate experience – regardless of the instructor's expertise or the quality of the content (Williams & Lahman, 2011). The proposed project is designed to prevent such unfortunate outcomes, providing a ready means by which to foster community and promote collaboration and engagement. The use of Slack is intended to serve as an adjunct to other forms of online communication and collaboration. While instruction may take place within Slack, and for my classes it often does, Slack is not meant to serve as a replacement for synchronous classes and live discussions. Nor is it meant solely to replace the asynchronous discussion forum in the LMS (though it can be used to do so). Instead, the learning community will use Slack as home base, allowing them to meet, collaborate, and engage in dialogue related to various aspects of online learning: In Slack, what might have otherwise been a days-long email chain or awkward asynchronous discussion, can happen in minutes as natural conversation, whether via text chat (an option frequently appreciated by students with social anxiety) or by jumping into a video or audio call. What might have been six different versions of a document floating between co-authors is now a centralized document with multiple active collaborators. Instead of students waiting, hoping a classmate looks at a discussion forum, there is now a sense of live, real-time presence.

Paraphrasing one of my students, "When I get online and see your 'Active' status dot, it's like peeking down the hallway and seeing your office door cracked open. I know I can poke my head in and that feels great." This feeling has been echoed numerous times since I began using Slack in my courses. It is incredibly difficult to understate the importance of this fundamental fact: The online experience is dramatically different from

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the in-person experience. Online learning has the potential to bring the world to students and bring students into a world of community – but only if the affordances of the medium are properly exploited. Treating online learning platforms as simple content delivery systems, however, is a misuse of the technology and a failure to leverage the medium to its greatest advantage.

One simple way to better leverage the medium is to promote community. Speaking on the topic of "belongingness" in online classes, Dr. Blower lamented in a 2018 CUES presentation: "Online, I can't figure out how to do that [promote a sense of belonging]. Yet.[2]" This project aims to move yet into the present, providing students, instructors, and staff an easily accessible and intuitive online community space, using industry-standard tools repurposed for education. While Slack can be used for a variety of academic purposes, including discourse, project collaboration, and peer review, it is a multi-purpose platform, widely used in business and industry, that students will likely encounter again in their professional careers. Therefore, use of Slack as outlined in this proposal presents numerous advantages.

Furthermore, as a CUES Distinguished Fellow, I will work to develop and promote workshops designed to help faculty learn more about building community in online and hybrid courses and programs (or simply maintaining community beyond the brick-and-mortar classroom). I will also work with the CUES Director to determine what form of Broader Engagement would be most beneficial to the university at large and to the CUES program's future. This could be in collaboration with the Office of Instruction and Assessment, as they currently provide small workshops on community building, as well.

Proposed Activities or Methods

This project is designed to answer the question, "How best can we improve learning through a sense of belonging and community, specifically in fully online and hybrid programs at distance?" The proposed answer to this, based within and beyond the Community of Practice framework (Wenger, 1999; Wenger & Snyder, 2000), is the development of a large online community that includes faculty, staff, and students, leveraging "participation, engagement, interaction, creativity and cohesion" (Tsiotakis & Jimoyiannis, 2015, p. 47). Ideally, the project will run for three years. Each semester, the goal would be to on-board a new entity, be that program/instructor, department, student group, et cetera. Three years is appropriate because of the relatively unique 2+2 system at the distance campus network. As we offer Bachelor of Applied Science degrees, the vast majority of our students come from a Community College. As such, they typically spend two years with us, making efficient community-building a priority. This project also potentially presents an opportunity to carve even deeper partnerships with local community colleges to extend the University community beyond the 2+2 window.

A three-year project would ensure that by the third year as many UA South students as possible in the programs that have joined in with the project will both enter *and leave* having been immersed the entire time, providing the consistency, presence, and persistence crucial to successful learning in online contexts (Joksimovic & Gaševic, 2015). If possible, keeping these alumni within the community to build more ties between current and former students is also preferable. My main focus in the project will be to work with other instructors and program directors to bring them into the community and determine how best to serve their students. A number of faculty have expressed their interest in moving in the direction of this project but also expressed a lack of available time or resources. This project is aimed at addressing those roadblocks by providing a scalable and efficient framework for inclusion. Main benchmarks for this transition will be the number of those entities and students added to the team. A growth of roughly 100 users annually is the target. Pre- and post-semester surveys will be administered to instructors and students to determine how better to improve the culture and effectiveness of the team and strengthen the community of practice.

This is in large part a continuation of previous, small-scale and exploratory research of my own that has been presented locally (Straight, 2016) and nationally (Straight, 2017), both specifically with Slack as the selected tool and generally as an exploration of contemporary means of building distance community online. One goal of this proposed project is to expand the scale at which the benefits and affordances of this community-

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[2]http://streaming.oia.arizona.edu/clientFlashABR/play.php?clipname=/perm/cues/cues_fellow_101718/web.smil&align=left&autoplay=off&help=on&aspect=wide

and belongingness-building ecosystem can be offered and systematically explored going forward. It is my contention that an ecosystem such as this (though possibly not *exactly* this, which the project is also designed to determine) will supplant previous iterations such as online forums did to email and email did to bulletin boards.

History, Details, and Justification of Chosen Tool

The tool by which this project hopes to succeed in increasing a sense of belonging and community is Slack. Mostly known in business, Slack is a team communication tool intended to streamline community and build a transparent knowledge base. I began using Slack in my online classes in 2015 and, as it became a successful method of instruction and communication, led me to co-write a grant to bring it to other instructors that wished to use it. Our Slack team was established in April of 2016 for use in the following fall semester. In that first semester, we had 54 actively daily users and the peak daily messages reached 350 (Sept 22, 2016). As of April 16, 2019, we have 169 daily active users and a peak daily messages of 1,953 (April 10, 2019). Total members is now at 770. Total messages sent since Wednesday, April 13, 2016: 177,641. Clearly, it has become a tremendous communication hub.

This is not limited to purely academic discussions. In a small survey of our UA South Slack team participants in 2018 (N=50), 64% of students reported that they either use the Slack team to communicate with others in non-class-related ways or expressed a desire to begin. Programs using the Slack team at UA South include Educational Technology, Informatics, Cyber Operations, Network Operations, Computer Science, and English. Other Slack teams across campus include the Veteran Student Center, UX@UA, UITS, the Office of Digital Learning, and programs in Optics, Law, Public Health IT, Engineering, RDI, CAPLA, AIS, Housing and Residential Life, Integrative Medicine, and more. Slack's grassroots growth at the university, combined with this project, may serve as the justification for engaging in a full-campus solution, bringing the possibility of community evidenced within these examples to the study body at large. This falls within Pillar 2 of the Strategic Plan as it seeks to build "culture founded on interdisciplinary collaboration and are committed to do together what no individual department or faculty member can do alone.[3]"

As in our own Slack team, the initial on-boarding and first impression of the culture is key to students' successful and persistent use of the tool to collaborate (Küçüka, 2010). As such, I will be working summers to develop comprehensive best practices, on-boarding, and support documentation–based on my experience as team administrator for the last 3 years and feedback from students and other instructors–for programs and offices that wish to on-board. I will continue to improve upon and expand these materials, bringing them to larger audiences, such as at conferences or summits. These include but are not limited to hypermedia text documents, screencasts, and customizing a question-and-answer automated bot inside the Slack team to answer questions, should anyone have them[4]. This is no small venture, as the kinds of support and instruction needed by a staff office is wholly different from that needed by an instructor wishing to move class communication into the program. While some support materials have been developed (connecting D2L to Slack, automating channel enrollment, et cetera), a much more comprehensive guide is necessary. This guide may also be useful outside the university as the kind of methodology and material other universities may wish to have for themselves, reaffirming and seeking to solidify the University of Arizona as a bleeding-edge online education innovation incubator as we move into 2020.

During the project period, UA South will be transitioning to a "college model" (name TBD). During this transition, the faculty in "shared" programs (those offered at both the main campus and the distance campuses; Psychology and English, for example) will be returning to their main campus "homes" while continuing to be offered at distance campuses. This opportunity would allow us to bring this community-building methodology to an even larger audience, potentially serving as the impetus and springboard for a full-campus adoption. This also benefits students in Arizona Online, in which nearly all of UA South programs are offered. Having this Slack team–or a federation of them, interconnected through shared channels–aims to create communities of practice and improve teaching and social presence within participating programs with transparency and genuineness.

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[3]https://arizona.app.box.com/s/di3hlmppfkg05j9xohzowa3sku7eq9vu

[4]https://get.slack.help/hc/en-us/articles/202026038-An-introduction-to-Slackbot

Evidence of Current or Past Scholarship and Innovation

As a Career-Track faculty and dual program director with an 80% teaching and 20% service contract my time and support for research and publication is necessarily limited, demonstrating, I feel, the passion I have for this project. It stems directly from a co-authored Catalyst grant offered by the Classroom Technology Upgrade project. The "Innovation Grant" was designed to pay for the pilot use of Slack as an interdisciplinary, cross-program communication and community hub for UA South students within (but not limited to) the Educational Technology, Informatics, and Organizational Leadership programs. Scholarship that followed (ie, Straight, 2016 and Straight, 2017) revealed a marked improvement in student engagement, satisfaction, and feeling of community and belongingness compared to more "traditional" learning and communication management systems. I then later went on to write about the use of Slack in online programs for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. This, in turn, led me to be offered the role of Social Media Advisor for the Chan Zuckerberg *Learning Science Research Nurturing Students & Classroom Innovation* (LRNSCI) project by the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE).

It's my firm belief, supported by my own research and experience as well as Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer's (2001) *Community of Inquiry* framework, that student success, satisfaction, and belongingness can be directly tied to authentic, genuine interaction with their instructors, other students, and the content. As such, my participation in and study of *personal learning networks* (PLNs), very closely tied with the current project, has also been award-winning (see Straight, 2019 and Shah-Nelson, Gunder, Stewart, Romanoski, Knott, Scragg, & Straight, 2018). We created a framework for building and maintaining PLNs (Gunder, Knott, & Straight, 2018) that draws on not just evidence-based methods but comes from a place of passion for learning and love of self and community. Based on this, we are in the process of co-authoring a book on the topic.

However, most closely tied to the current project is my position as the inaugural *Faculty Fellow*[5] for the UA South distance campus network, a position that also allows me to expand my teaching to first-year Honors students in a seminar titled *Cyborgs and Transhumanism*. In 2017, I was approached and asked to determine how to bring the Faculty Fellow mission (to "shrink" the large university experience into a more personal, more intimate small liberal arts college-like experience) for students spread across multiple campuses and even across the globe (as in the case of Arizona Online). The Faculty Fellows are a select group of innovative, caring faculty from across the institution, and I was honored to be asked. In part, one way for me to accomplish this was to renew a (then somewhat defunct) podcast and realign the content to fit the Fellows' goals. This has led me to present nationally on both the general idea of academic podcasting (Straight, Gunder, Stewart, King de Ramirez, Thompson, & Pizzo, 2018) and specifically on my own journey and experience (Straight, 2019), which also won an award. This also led to me being interviewed by Inside HigherEd's *Inside Digital Learning* (forthcoming) about how instead of bringing my disparate students to me, I decided to go *to them* by means of podcasting. An evidence-based text resulting from this experience is also in the works.

Closer to home I have been an invited speaker on the topic of the future of educational technology at the TENWEST festival, a local event focusing on "the arts, social impact, STEM, entrepreneurship, technology, and sustainability." On a more local outreach level, I was also asked to speak at the Gridley Middle School to the parents of 6-8th grade students on STEM resources and career opportunities for their children. These events, especially, underscore the importance of being forward-thinking in terms of how we envision education, as, just as in the private sector, I believe the way today's 6th graders will learn when they reach our institution may be wholly unexpected. We should be doing all we can *today* to prepare for them *tomorrow*.

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[5]http://saem-aiss.arizona.edu/sr-vp/faculty-programs/faculty-fellows

Detailed Budget

Slack offers an "Education discount" at 85% off the standard paid plan, which our team has availed itself of since 2016[6]. Providing a detailed budget for a project like this is difficult beyond stipends and salary. The reason for this being the nature of how Slack bills, which, ironically, though it makes our own budgeting more difficult is actually more cost effective[7]. For example, while a single user active for 365 days may be charged the full annual amount, the "fair billing" policy only charges for the time that user is active. As summers maintain fairly low enrollment in our programs, this money saved will make it possible to engage even more students, faculty, staff, and collaborators than the simple math would suggest.

The budget outlined below includes a stipend for my own on-boarding, documentation and training development, and research, while a part-time student worker will be hired to assist in the administrative duties throughout the school year. Increasing amounts of funding for Slack licenses occur throughout the project (being supplemented by a reduction in my own stipend). The CUES Fellow salary would be paid entirely over the summer but in a show of support from my associate dean (department head), I have been provided with a course release for the 2019-2020 academic year to assist in the project's success.

Personnel Salaries (include salary and ERE)	2020	2021	2022
CUES Fellow *(includes ERE; paid entirely during summer)*	$10,000	$9,000	$8,000
Faculty Collaborators	$0	$0	$0
Students	$0	$0	$0
Graduate	$0	$0	$0
Undergraduate *(50% fall, 50% spring)*	$7,000	$7,000	$7,000
Post-docs	$0	$0	$0
Other Professionals (list)	$0	$0	$0
Graduate Student Tuition Remission	$0	$0	$0
Travel	$0	$0	$0
Materials, Supplies, & Other Project Costs (Slack licenses)	$3,000	$4,000	$5,000
Total (not to exceed $20,000 in a single year)	**$20,000.00**	**$20,000.00**	**$20,000.00**
Additional funds committed by Department, College, or Other Unit (requires verification signatures)*	$-	$-	$-

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[6]https://get.slack.help/hc/en-us/articles/206646877-Slack-for-Education
[7]https://get.slack.help/hc/en-us/articles/218915077-Fair-Billing-Policy

References

Anderson, T., Rourke, L., Garrison, D. R., Archer, W. (2001). Assessing Teaching presence in a Computer Conference Environment. *Journal of asynchronous learning networks*, *5*(2), 1-17.

Benade, L. (2015). Bits, Bytes and Dinosaurs: using Levinas and Freire to address the concept of 'twenty-first century learning', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *47*(9), 935-948. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857. 2015.1035159

Gunder, A., Knott, J., & Straight, R. (2018). #SquadGoalsNetwork - Remixing the Personal Learning Network. Presented at the *2018 OLC Accelerate conference*, Orlando, FL.

Joksimovic, S., & Gaševic, D. (2015). Social presence in online discussions as a process predictor of academic performance. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, 31, 638–654. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcal.12107

Küçüka, M. (2010). Lurking in online asynchronous discussion. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *2*(2), 2260–2263. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.319

Shah-Nelson, C., Gunder, A., Stewart, J., Romanoski, M. Knott, J., Scragg, B., & Straight, R. (2018). With a Little Help From My Friends: The Power of the PLN. Winner of the Effective Practice Award. Presented at the *2018 OLC Accelerate conference*, Orlando, FL.

Straight, R. (2019). The New Professor: How I Podcasted My Way Into Students' Lives (And How You Can, Too). Selected Best In Track. Presented at the *2019 OLC Innovate conference*, Denver, CO.

Straight, R., Gunder, A., Stewart, J., King de Ramirez, C., Thompson, K., & Pizzo, J. And We're Live! A Rough Guide on Academic Podcasting. Presented at the *2018 OLC Accelerate conference*, Orlando, FL.

Straight, R. (2017). Slacking Off in Class: Cloud-Based Team Collaboration in Online Higher Education Programs. Presented as an Innovation Lab at the *2017 OLC Innovate conference*, New Orleans, LA.

Straight, R. (2016). Slack and the Online Classroom. Presented at the *2016 University of Arizona IT Summit*, Tucson, AZ.

Straight, R. & Gunder, A. (2016). Innovative Learning Projects: Promoting Leading-Edge Opportunities in Higher Education. Poster presented at the *2016 University of Arizona IT Summit*, Tucson, AZ.

Tsiotakis, P., & Jimoyiannis, A. (2016). Internet and Higher Education Critical factors towards analysing teachers' presence in on-line learning communities. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 28, 45–58. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2015.09.002

Wenger, E. (1999). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity.* Cambridge university press.

Wenger, E. C., & Snyder, W. M. (2000). Communities of practice: The organizational frontier. *Harvard business review*, *78*(1), 139-146.

Williams, L. & Lahman, M. (2011). Online Discussion, Student Engagement, and Critical Thinking, *Journal of Political Science Education*, *7*(2), 143-162. https://doi.org/10.1080/15512169.2011.564919

Yuan, J. and Kim, C. (2014). Development of online learning communities. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*, *30*, 220-232. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcal.12042

Dr. Ryan Straight, Assistant Professor

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April 12, 2019

Employment

Academic Positions

Assistant Professor - Educational Technology, University of Arizona, South. May 2017 - present
Co-Program Director, Educational Technology. August 2018 - present
Program Director, Informatics - Digital Design. August 2018 - present

Senior Lecturer- Educational Technology, University of Arizona, South - January 2015 - May 2017.
Co-Program Director, Educational Technology. January 2015 - August 2015.

Adjunct Instructor - Educational Technology, University of Arizona, South - June 2014 - December 2014.

Professional Positions

Instructional Technology Training Specialist - University Information Technology Services, University of Arizona - Tucson, AZ - April 2012 - January 2015.

Student System Testing Analyst - Office of the University Registrar, Ohio University - Athens, OH - August 2010 to April 2012.

Undergraduate Catalog Manager - Office of the University Registrar, Ohio University - Athens, OH - August 2009 to June 2010.

Education

- Ph.D Degree, Instructional Technology, May 2015 (Ohio University)

    - Dissertation: An Exploratory Study of Augmented Reality and Mobile Games Examining Ingress Player Motivation and Potential Educational Value

- M.Ed Degree, Cultural Studies in Education, June 2009 (Ohio University)

    - Seminar Paper: Religion and Public Education, A Review of the Literature

- BS.Ed. Degree, Integrated Language Arts, June 2005 (Ohio University)

    - Major: Secondary English Education (7th - 12th grades American and British Literature)
    - Minors: English Literature and Philosophy

Fields of Interest and Study

Innovation in educational and instructional technology, asynchronous and synchronous communication in online education, technological mediation of experience, Postphenomenology, digital humanities, cyber operations and security, human-computer interaction, game-based learning and gamification.

Teaching

Undergraduate, University of Arizona

INFV 302 - Statistics in the Information Age

ETCV 310 - Integrating Technology into the Curriculum

INFV 401 - Introduction to Human-Computer Interaction

ETCV 404 - Principles and Practices of Distance Education

INFV 405 - Introduction to Serious Game Design

INFV 406 - Introduction to Game Development

INFV 411 - Learning Technologies in the Digital Age

HNRS 195H - First-Year Honors Seminar (Special topics: Postphenomenology)

Graduate, University of Arizona

ETCV 510 - Learning Theory in Instructional Design

ETCV 524 - Educational Gaming and Simulations

ETCV 530 - Multimedia Applications in Education

ETCV 538 - Mobile Technologies for Learning

ETCV 622 - Introduction to Interface Design

ETCV 623 - Designing Online Learning Environments

ETCV 631 - Advanced Multimedia

Scholarly Activity and Research Interests

Conference Proceeding Publications

- Straight, R. (2016). Emergent mentorship and learning communities of practice among players of augmented reality video games. In *Proceedings of E-Learn: World Conference on E-Learning in Corporate, Government, Healthcare, and Higher Education.* Washington, DC: AACE.

- Smith, J., Straight, R. & Franklin, T. (2011). Student occupational expectations: A web 2.5 geolocative study. *Proceedings of the Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education 2011* (pp. 2522-2526). Honolulu, HI: AACE.

- Straight, R. (2011). Commercial off-the-shelf video games as computer-assisted language learning environments. In *Proceedings of Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference 2011* (pp. 1982-1986). Chesapeake, VA: AACE.

- Straight, R. & Smith, J. (2011). The development and delivery of custom mobile apps for K-12 learning: Viable options for educators. In *Proceedings of the Society of Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference 2011* (pp. 3102-3107). Chesapeake, VA: AACE.

Presentations

- Straight, R. "The New Professor: How I Podcasted My Way Into Students' Lives (And How You Can, Too)." Selected *Best In Track*. Presented at the 2019 OLC Innovate conference, Denver, CO.

- Straight, R., Gunder, A., Stewart, J., King de Ramirez, C., Thompson, K., & Pizzo, J. (2018). "And We're Live! A Rough Guide on Academic Podcasting." Presented at the 2018 OLC Accelerate conference, Orlando, FL.

- Gunder, A., Knott, J., & Straight, R. (2018). "#SquadGoalsNetwork - Remixing the Personal Learning Network." Presented at the 2018 OLC Accelerate conference, Orlando, FL.

- Shah-Nelson, C., Gunder, A., Stewart, J., Romanoski, M. Knott, J., Scragg, B., & Straight, R. (2018). "With a Little Help From My Friends: The Power of the PLN." Presented at the 2018 OLC Accelerate conference, Orlando, FL.

- Straight, R. (2017). "Slacking Off in Class: Cloud-Based Team Collaboration in Online Higher Education Programs." Presented as an Innovation Lab at the 2017 Online Learning Consortium Innovate conference, New Orleans, LA.

- Straight, R. (2016). "Slack and the Online Classroom." Presented at the 2016 University of Arizona IT Summit, Tucson, AZ.

- Straight, R. & Gunder, A. (2016). "Innovative Learning Projects: Promoting Leading-Edge Opportunities in Higher Education." Poster presented at the 2016 University of Arizona IT Summit, Tucson, AZ.

- Straight, R. (2014). "Microsoft Outlook: Tips and Tricks You May Not Know." Presented at the University of Arizona Staff Advisory Council 2014 Crossroads Conference.

- Smith, J., Straight, R. (2011). "New Technologies in Research Presentation: Broadcastr." Presented at the 2011 Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education Conference.

- House, C., Smith, J., Straight, R. (2011). "The OHIO Map App Project." Presented at the 2011 OHIO Mobile Learning Symposium.

- Straight, R. (2011). "Commercial Off-The-Shelf Video Games as Computer-Assisted Language Learning Environments: Heavy Rain." Presented at the 2011 Society of Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference.

- Smith, J., Straight, R. (2011). "The Development and Delivery of Custom Mobile Apps for K-12 Learning: Viable Options for Educators." Presented at the 2011 Society of Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference.

- Straight, R. (2010). "Commercial Video Games and Language Learning: Web-based Flash Games and TEFL/TESL" Presented at the Technology Fair, 2010 Ohio University CALL Conference "Language Learning in an Online World."

Writing Positions and Projects

- Staff writer, *Chronicle of Higher Education's ProfHacker blog* (2017 - current)

Consultancies, Speaking Invitations, and Workshops

- Steering Committee, OLC Innovate 2019: Workshops track co-chair.

- Social Media Advisor, *Learning Science Research Nurturing Students & Classroom Innovation (LRN-SCI)*, International Society for Technology in Education, 2018 - 2019.

- Online Learning Consortium workshop facilitator, *Gamified Learning Environments*, 2019.

- Featured panelist, *TENWEST Festival - Social Impact Summit, "Innovation in Educational Technology," Tucson, AZ - 2017.

- Invited speaker, "STEM Resources for Parents and 6-8th grade children," Gridley Middle School, Tucson, AZ - 2016.

- Guest, Versatilist podcast - 2015.

- Instructional advisor, NoteBowl, LLC - 2015.

- Technology consultant, Pima County Board of Elections, 2015.

- Workshop: "Integrating Technology Into the Classroom: A Workshop for Faculty and Instructors," Ohio University, September 21, 2011, Ohio University.

- Invited Panel Discussion: "Using Mobile Apps in the Classroom-From a Teaching and Learning Perspective," OHIO Mobile Learning Symposium, May 16, 2011.

Journal Reviews And Editing

- Reviewer: Issues and Trends in Educational Technology (Winter 2015-present)

- Reviewer: Journal of Visual Literacy (2010 - 2013)

- Reviewer: Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology (2010 - 2013)

- Guest editor: Democracy & Education, vol 6, no. 1 (2006), issue title "Reading the World: Popular Culture, Critical Media Literacy & Youth"

Professional Service

Awards, Honorary Positions, and Fellowships

- Best In Track: "The New Professor: How I Podcasted My Way Into Students' Lives (And How You Can, Too)", OLC Innovate 2019.

- Effective Practice Award, "#SquadGoalsNetwork – Remixing the Personal Learning Network," Angela Gunder, Jessica L. Knott, Ryan Straight, Clark Shah-Nelson, Keegan Long-Wheeler, Benjamin Scragg, John Stewart; The University of Arizona, Michigan State University, The University of Maryland, The University of Oklahoma, Arizona State University. OLC Accelerate 2018.

- Honors Professor, Honors College, spring semesters.

- UA South Faculty Fellow, inaugural, 2017 - present.

Committees

- Student Showcase organization committee, member (2018)
- University Search Committee for Online Teaching and Learning Meeting Software (2017 - 2018)
- UA South Policy Committee (2017 - 2018)
- University Funding Committee (2017 - 2018)
- UA South Technology Committee (2016 - 2018)
- Graduate College Grievance Committee (2015 - 2018)
- Outstanding Student Award, Undergraduate & Graduate (2015)
- Student Showcase organization committee, chair (2015, 2016, 2017)

Oversight and Advisory

- Innovative Learning Project (2016 - present)
- Faculty advisor, Associated Students of Arizona South Student Government (2017 - present)
- UA South Campuswide Slack Team, Owner and Administrator (2016-present)
- UA South Program Assessment Team (2015)
- Innovative Learning Oversight Team (2015)
- Consultant/Subject Matter Expert, Campus Technology Upgrade Program, University of Arizona (2013 - present)

Development

- Curriculum development: INFV 496 - Special Topics in Informatics (approved Fall 2018)
- Curriculum development: INFV 406 - Introduction to Game Development (approved Fall 2018)
- Curriculum development: ETCV 538 - Mobile Technologies for Learning (approved Spring 2015)
- Program development: Educational Technology Student Orientation course
- Program development: Implementation of program-level communication system (Slack)

Active Grants

- Innovative Learning Project: 2016 (Co-PI, 20%) "Campuswide Novel Asynchronous Communication" One-time grant: $3,000

Professional Memberships And Activities

AZTEA - Arizona Technology in Education Association - member

HEVGA - Higher Education Video Game Alliance - charter member

ITSA - Instructional Technology Scholars Association - president, 2010-11, 2011-12 academic years

ISTE - International Society for Technology in Education - member

AACE - Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education - member

SITE - Society for Instructional Technology & Teacher Education - member

AECT - Association for Educational Communications and Technology - member

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Memo:

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.

April 16, 2019

Distinguished Fellowship Review Committee
Center for University Education Scholarship (CUES)
University of Arizona

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to confirm my support for Dr. Ryan Straight's application for the Center for University Education Scholarship (CUES) Distinguished Fellowship. Ryan's passion for this project has been apparent over the past three years with the award of the Innovative Learning Project offered through the Classroom Technology Upgrade Program. He took this grand challenge to heart by using a common application (SLACK) for building and maintaining a community in the online classroom environment. The engagement he created among his students has been transformative and led to authentic conversations building robust communities among students and faculty.

Ryan has proved himself to be a leader within our college and on our campus in Sierra Vista. He is a Faculty Fellow representing UA South by fostering student-faculty relationships. His presence is felt in both the face to face and virtual settings as he travels from our various locations to attend events and meet with students. He works seamlessly alongside faculty, students and staff in creating an infectious energy embraced by our communities. He also has made a positive impact on the national stage through his scholarship and service by presenting at online conferences and broadcasting podcasts.

The opportunity for collaboration and resource sharing with this proposal's activity include research opportunities, faculty development, the introduction of innovative technologies, and genuine communication within the online environments. This type of academic collaboration is beneficial to faculty in learning about new teaching tools, and to the students in increasing the breadth of their knowledge and learning different approaches to innovative interactions in online settings.

I am in strong support of Ryan's application and encourage the committee to provide him with this unique opportunity. Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions about this letter of recommendation.

Sincerely,

Melody J Buckner

Melody J. Buckner, PhD
Interim Dean, UA South
Senior Director of Digital Learning and Online Education
Faculty Affiliate, College of Education
University of Arizona

April 9, 2019

Dear CUES Fellowship Committee,

It is with great pleasure that I write this recommendation letter for Dr. Ryan Straight for a CUES Distinguished Fellowship at The University of Arizona.

I have known Dr. Straight in a professional capacity for almost 10 years, first in his role as a staff member on the training team for UITS and now as a faculty member at UA South. Dr. Straight is engaging as an instructor and approachable as a mentor to students and staff alike.

Dr. Straight has recently redesigned the curriculum for the Digital Design track of the Bachelor of Applied Science in Informatics, not only to strengthen the overall content and make the modality flexible and accessible to students around the state and the globe, but also to make the curriculum inclusive and meaningful to a new population of students we are serving at our San Luis Technology Center on the U.S.-Mexico border just outside of Yuma, AZ. He is open to trying new modalities, course designs, online tools, and teaching strategies to meet the needs of our diverse student populations and help support our Hispanic Serving Institution goals. He designs his courses to speak to a 35 year old active duty soldier joining the class from the Fort Huachuca Education center, as well as a 20 year old first generation student joining from San Luis, not an easy feat! Teaching synchronously via zoom and interactive television equipped classrooms is a very challenging modality for instruction but Dr. Straight was one of the first faculty at UA South to commit to the synchronous online class meetings for online and in-person students to come together in a classroom space that defies geographical barriers to sharing information and learning from each other.

In addition to his teaching duties, Dr. Straight accepted the role as the Faculty Fellow for our branch campus locations across the state of Arizona, including Yuma, Chandler, Nogales, Tucson, Sierra Vista, and Douglas. To be a resource to students attending distance sites across the state, Dr. Straight has had to be innovative, both with his travel time and the tools that he uses to connect with students. Dr. Straight connects with our students via Slack and Zoom regularly, and developed a podcast series to share information with our students and help them feel connected to the University: https://thenewprofessor.com/. He meets students where they are, in an effort to connect them with faculty in a way they may not have the opportunity to do otherwise. He also participates in on-campus activities, UA Family Day, scholarship receptions, new student orientations, and takes students on field trips as part of his Faculty Fellow role. Engaging our student population at the distance sites can be challenging but Dr. Straight is adept at using traditional and more innovative methods to engage students in their campus communities.

Dr. Straight also shares his dynamic teaching style with Honors students by teaching a freshman seminar through the Honors College. He inspires students to embrace technology in their learning and has an impact across the UA in unique ways. Additionally, he shares his scholarship and teaching innovations in various ways with the Online Learning Consortium (OLC), such as being a conference committee member for 2019 OLC Innovate, and was recently recognized with a 2018 Effective Practice Award by OLC.

Dr. Straight is an innovative faculty member, capable of helping us tackle teaching challenges by engaging with our students and being proactive with, and responsive to, the needs of a diverse and changing population of students. Please feel free to contact me with any further questions by phone at 520-668-9946 or email at swieland@email.arizona.edu.

Sincerely,

Sarah Wieland, M.Ed
Assistant Dean, Academic Advising & Student Services
The University of Arizona South

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To the CUES selection committee   March 9, 2019

I am writing to support Dr. Ryan Straight's nomination to become a CUES Fellow. I have worked with Ryan since he joined the program as an Adjunct in 2014, advancing to a Senior Lecturer in 2015, and to an Assistant Professor in 2017. This rapid progression demonstrates how much we value the contributions he has made to the program. So much so, that I asked him this year to be Co-Director of the program overseeing our undergraduate offerings.

I have always been impressed with Ryan's eagerness to embrace innovative teaching strategies. While we are an online program, much of what he does is also applicable in a face-to-face or blended environment. He has had a profound impact on us in three major areas.

First, is our delivery of content through D2L. Through his work, content is now delivered in the majority of our courses via Google Docs with links from within D2L. This allows us to easily share and edit content of D2L modules with each other, but it also allows us to share content with students. Since some of our students are military trainers, we often have students who work in a secure environment where they are not allowed to access D2L. By providing links to the various module pages in Docs, students can access course material when on a work break. This method also allows us to share course content with students who are "shopping" for a course and don't have access to D2L. Our switch to Docs has also allowed us to standardize the "look and feel" of the content pages. This provides consistency across courses and instructors, ensuring that key information (learning outcomes, module objectives, general content, etc.) appear in consistent locations for the students.

The second area of impact is in the use of Podcasting. Ryan has recently started his own podcast, "The New Professor," in which he posts his individual thoughts about education as well as interviewing guests who have "information I think my students want to hear." [From a presentation he gave recently at the OLC Innovate conference] He selects the people he interviews based on his work within the program and also as a Faculty Fellow and from his Honors courses.

Along the way, he has developed a number of techniques that allow other instructors to develop their own podcasts. In fact, I will be starting a new podcast myself based on working with Ryan. His work in this area has been recognized by the Online Learning Consortium (OLC) where he recently received a *Best in Track* award for a presentation on Podcasting. He will also be joining the International Society for Education's Learning Sciences Project as a Social Media Advisor based on his work in this area.

The third, and perhaps most impressive impact Ryan has had on the program is his introduction of Slack. Slack is a communication tool that combines text, audio, and video communication while integrating with a number of online applications (Google Docs, Trello, RSS feeds, etc.).

Ryan first introduced Slack into his own courses. But through his guidance, we now use Slack in all of our courses. He has also worked with half a dozen other programs at UA South and advised a handful of programs on main campus. While I started out using Slack as a way to facilitate general discussions among the students, under Ryan's guidance I have now replaced all my D2L discussion forums with Slack channels.

While Slack can be accessed through a website, there is an application for desktops, smart phones, and tablets. We encourage our students to download these as it keeps them in constant contact with us. While some instructors may not want that much contact, I have found it has let me address simple student questions on the fly rather than having to address them in email. This has cut my email communications to almost nothing as students prefer getting rapid responses through Slack versus waiting for an email conversation.

Also, through the classes' social channel, I have learned about my student's professional and personal lives, providing me with a much stronger bond with my students. I do an informal survey mid-course with my students and often get comments on what's going right that "Slack makes me feel much more engaged with the class." I have also received responses that Slack "let's me keep in touch with my classmates." In fact, we did a survey of students last year and two-thirds indicated that they use Slack to communicate with each other outside of class.

It is important to note that Ryan is in a career-track position. As such he is not required to do research or publish. However, through his podcasting and work with the Online Learning Consortium, he meets the requirements of Innovation and Scholarship under the University's Inclusive View of Scholarship. For example, he was part of a team who received the Effective Practice Award at OLC Accelerate in 2018 for his work on developing the Squad Goals Network PLN framework. A framework that was implemented at the recent OLC Innovate conference.

To say that Ryan has had a fundamental and profound impact on the program is an understatement. Through his work, we have not only improved our daily impact on students within the program, but throughout UA South and into main campus, as well. I highly recommend him as a CUES Fellow.

Sincerely,

Christopher G. Johnson, Ph.D.
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Ian C Yarnell

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16, April 16, 2019

Distinguished Fellowship Review Committee
Center for University Education Scholarship (CUES)
University of Arizona

To the Review Committee

I am honored to write this letter in support of Dr. Ryan Straight as an applicant for a CUES Distinguished Fellowship. Throughout my time at University of Arizona South's BAS of Informatics – Digital Design program, Dr. Straight has been not only an innovator in the way distance learning classes are taught, but has given me the sense of community and belonging that I needed during times in which many online classes give students the perceptions that they are an afterthought. Having attended both traditional classes and distance classes, I know that this perception is often echoed among my peers.

Dr. Straight's utilization of an industry standard tool applied to education unifies distance learners and has truly given students a place to congregate and share their thoughts in an open forum that can be accessed from any device. This has been instrumental in providing feedback, sharing additional tools, and brings truth to the Virtual Open-Door policy which allows students to have correspondence with their instructors in a way that could take exponentially longer with traditional electronic communications. In many ways, Slack provides a communication method that is faster than any method utilized in a learning environment before; it gives us the ability to schedule a one-on-one meeting, and while in said meeting immediately transfer documents, files, resources while providing instant feedback.

As the University of Arizona continues to be a leader in technology-based and online education, Dr. Straight's plan to bring Slack to a broader scope within the University will highlight CUES' mission to serve as a model for change and improvement in university education by providing students with the essential sense of community needed to succeed. Since Slack is used by over 135,000 companies, students who

leave the program bring with them a fluency in a non-proprietary, popular industry tool.

Dr. Straight's course design, teaching methods, and use of real-world tools and knowledge have given my peers and I an incredibly rich and engaging environment that I never thought possible in a distance learning setting. His dedication to the practice of educational innovation has fostered an active learning culture in which students from all over the world are able to gain a true 21st century scholarly experience. As one of the first graduates of this program under Dr. Straight's guidance, it is with great enthusiasm, honor, and gratitude that I offer my full support for Dr. Straight's application.

Sincerely,

Ian C Yarnell, BAS(g), ABM