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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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian C Yarnell', with a stylized, flowing script.

Ian C Yarnell, BAS(g), ABM

