

## **Overview of Invited Support Letters**

I struggled with who I should ask to write letters of support for this portfolio. I decided not to ask for letters from current students. I was concerned current students might feel pressure to write a letter. I also considered asking faculty colleagues that have observed my teaching and my interaction with graduate students to write letters. However, Exhibit 2 (Formal Teaching Evaluations) already includes my department's Personnel Committee evaluations of my teaching. Therefore, I decide to ask former students to write all six letters of support. I selected students who were in more than one of my classes and across time from 2010 to 2015.

PMB 0576, 230 Appleton Place  
Nashville, TN 37203-5721

March 28, 2016

Dear Awards Committee:

It is my pleasure to write this letter in full support of the nomination of Dr. Russell Lang for Texas State University's Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching. I am a two-time graduate of the special education program at Texas State, most recently with a master's degree in 2013, and am currently a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University.

There is no question that I would not be where I am now without Dr. Lang's mentorship. He reached out to encourage me to consider pursuing my PhD on my first day in the master's program, and followed up on occasion. When I eventually expressed an interest, he provided opportunities to contribute to research, as well as considerable support for the application process. Since then, he has continued to be an excellent source of professional advice and encouragement.

In the classroom, Dr. Lang puts the principles of applied behavior analysis to good use, motivating and reinforcing student learning. This makes him a highly effective teacher, even with material that is frequently challenging.

In closing, I consider myself very fortunate to have been Dr. Lang's student, and I strongly recommend him for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Amy Harbison". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Amy Harbison  
(512) 698-2711  
[a.harbison@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:a.harbison@vanderbilt.edu)



Dear Awards Committee Members:

I am writing you in support of Dr. Russell Lang who has been nominated for the 2016 Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching. I was fortunate enough to study under Dr. Lang during my Master's career at Texas State from 2012 – 2014. As a Graduate Research Assistant in the Clinic for Autism Research, Evaluation, and Support (CARES), I had the opportunity to work closely with Dr. Lang and collaborate with him on several research projects. During my time at Texas State, and especially while working in the CARES clinic, I interacted with Dr. Lang on a daily basis and I continue to work with him on research to this day. I have come to know Dr. Lang very well as a professor and mentor and I highly recommend him for this award.

I have never personally met someone more knowledgeable in the field of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) than Dr. Lang. His understanding of the science and of individuals with developmental disabilities is exceptional and I admire his wisdom and passion for the field. He is a brilliant and dynamic teacher and I always looked forward to his classes. Dr. Lang challenged us as students; he encouraged critical thinking while still fostering our foundational knowledge of ABA. The occasional debate was not uncommon in one of his classes! Dr. Lang's lectures were engaging and meaningful, and with his fun personality (and sporadic jokes), I found them to be very enjoyable. In addition, Dr. Lang was an approachable professor and was regularly available during his office hours, ready to discuss any concerns or questions I had.

As a mentor, Dr. Lang has inspired me to be a better student, researcher, and practitioner. Dr. Lang played a pivotal role in my decision to pursue my doctoral degree and I am forever grateful for that. At the beginning of my Master's program, I would have never imagined I would continue on to pursue my Ph.D. Dr. Lang has been, and continues to be, one of my most supportive and influential mentors. It was Dr. Lang who encouraged me to apply to Trinity College Dublin and I can honestly say that I would not be where I am today if it were not for him!

I would like to reiterate my enthusiastic support for Dr. Lang's nomination. No one is more deserving of this prestigious award. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Devon Ramey

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27 March 2016

Dear Awards Committee,

I am writing this letter to strongly support the nomination of Dr. Russell Lang for the Texas State Presidential Award for Teaching. Dr. Lang is an exceptional teacher and mentor.

I have known Dr. Lang since 2012 when I began my masters program in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Texas State University. I was fortunate to take several of his classes while completing this program. Dr. Lang is extremely knowledgeable, but it is his enthusiasm and passion for the field that is most inspiring to his students. He has both a love for his job and the field of special education and applied behavior analysis, and will often tell his students he has the best job in the world. When taking his course in applied behavior analysis I found myself learning to look at research with both excitement and curiosity. Being a teacher at this time, I always felt as though he was able to break down the theoretical concepts into practical application that I could use to help teach my students.

Further, Dr. Lang is an amazing mentor. Even now while I am working to complete my doctorate program, I feel a similar level of support and encouragement. I remember my first research meetings with Dr. Lang where he told me that he would use the matching law to support my efforts. Simply stated, this meant he would put in the same amount of work as me, thus reinforcing my efforts. Today when I am in the position of mentoring students, I try to incorporate reinforcement strategies similar to his mentoring style.

In my last year of study at Texas State Dr. Lang did everything he could to encourage my pursuit of a PhD program. He provided me, and several other students in the cohort, opportunities to develop our researching skills. This often involved brainstorming potential research project, providing feedback on manuscripts, and invitations to work on invited book chapters. Without a doubt, these opportunities have shaped me into a better student and researcher. As I am now wrapping up my doctorate program and getting ready to submit my dissertation, I am extremely grateful to have been mentored by Dr. Lang.

Thank you for your consideration of Dr. Lang as a recipient of this award. Please do not hesitate to contact me for any additional information.

Sincerely,



Amarie Carnett, M.Ed., BCBA  
Doctoral Student  
School of Education  
Victoria University of Wellington

Farah El Zein, Ph.D.  
Special Education Consultant  
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March 28, 2016

Dear Awards Committee,

It is an honor and a privilege to be writing this letter recommending Dr. Russell Lang for the Texas State Presidential Award of Teaching. As a highly successful Associate Professor at Texas State University, Dr. Lang makes extraordinary contributions in the field of special education in every aspect of his job. Not only is he a successful instructor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Texas State, but he is also one of the most well-renowned researchers in the field of autism today. I am very fortunate to be one of his former students, as I learned so much from his talent and expertise as a skillful researcher, an effective teacher, and an influential mentor.

I was enrolled in Dr. Lang's first master's class (Communication Interventions for Children with Autism) at Texas State University in August 2010. Dr. Lang's teaching style made a huge influence on my career path and my scholarly accomplishments. From my personal experience as a former special educator, he opened my eyes to evidence-based practices in educating students with autism. He was the first faculty member in the department to organize a graduate level student research group, and I was fortunate to become a member of this group. Dr. Lang mentored us through the whole scholarly research process, from raising a high quality research question to submitting a manuscript for publication. Ever since, his research groups have been contributing to autism and developmental disabilities research through publishing peer-reviewed scholarly articles and presenting in national and international conferences. For example, Dr. Lang guided me through the application process to participate in a prestigious international autism conference in Brazil. Thanks to his efficient guidance and support, I was part of this important event in 2012.

Today, I am a Ph.D. graduate from the University of Texas at Austin, and I say with complete confidence, that Dr. Lang was one of the main contributors to my success in the program. Not only did he encourage me and support me to enter the Ph.D. program in the first place, but he was also one of my dissertation committee members. As a member of my dissertation committee, Dr. Lang gave me ongoing constructive feedback and helped me complete my dissertation with high levels of success. Not to mention, as soon as I entered the Ph.D. program at UT-Austin, I realized that I was one of the very few students there that were very well equipped with the knowledge and skill sets necessary to become an influential researcher. Of course, I gained much of this knowledge and many of these skills through Dr. Lang's effective mentoring skills. Additionally, as I seek a tenure-track faculty position, Dr. Lang continues to be supportive by recommending me for several Assistant Professor positions. Currently and until I find the right higher education institution to work for, I am an independent

special education consultant involved in several professional development and research projects in the U.S., Canada, and Lebanon.

In conclusion, I give Dr. Lang my highest possible recommendation to receive the Texas State Presidential Teaching Award. Dr. Lang is one of the very few professors who consistently practices effective teaching methods and applies influential mentoring skills, making a huge difference in his students' career paths.

Sincerely,

Farah El Zein. Ph.D.

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION  
AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Special Education Program

Jennifer Ninci  
Doctoral Candidate



March 28, 2016

Dear Awards Committee,

It is with great pleasure that I nominate an outstanding teacher and mentor, Dr. Russell Lang, to be honored with the Texas State University Presidential Award for Teaching. Dr. Lang started as an Assistant Professor of Special Education when I began my Master's program at Texas State. In addition to teaching a number of my courses, he mentored me in research and encouraged me to pursue doctoral studies. I am graduating with my Ph.D. in Educational Psychology this coming May. Dr. Lang has continued to collaborate with me in research and provide the most thoughtful advice over the years after I graduated.

Dr. Lang lends great expertise to students studying in the areas of applied behavior analysis, special education, and developmental and intellectual disabilities. He directs the Clinic for Autism Research, Evaluation, and Support. He has mentored several students in the Master's program to pursue doctoral studies after graduating. Dr. Lang invests time in mentorship that multiplies opportunities and accomplishments for everyone involved. He scaffolds to the level of support we need in leading our own research projects. The expectations Dr. Lang holds for his mentees extend far beyond the minimum requirements and they are matched appropriately by his support. As a result, Dr. Lang's mentees are prepared to join the most competitive Ph.D. programs within the fields of applied behavior analysis and special education.

His classroom environment is active. At the start of each class, he often provides a brief quiz and grades it as soon as each student finishes (as to provide a lesson in behavior analysis—the more immediate the

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consequence, the more powerful). Students have to attend and participate in class as some of his lecture slides have blank key words. He incorporates meaningful projects and multiple opportunities for small and large group discussions. I appreciate that he could balance staying on track with covering important concepts in sufficient depth. He regularly engages students in philosophic discussions and higher-order thinking. His humor and intellect are unmatched, leaving students excited to take his courses. I recall once, in the first class he taught at Texas State, he paused in his lecture for a moment to laugh because the entire class was staring up at him with big smiles. This epitomizes my memories of his classes. I hope that I can ignite the same spark in my students as a soon-to-be assistant professor.

Dr. Lang models impeccable rapport with students, stakeholders, and other professionals in the community, which I aim to emulate in my career. He demonstrates outstanding commitment and enthusiasm for teaching and mentoring. I hope the committee will give his nomination the upmost consideration. Please contact me if I can provide any additional information to support Dr. Lang.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jennifer Ninci".

Jennifer Ninci, M.Ed., BCBA  
Doctoral Candidate  
Educational Psychology  
Texas A&M University



March 23, 2016

Dear Awards Committee:

I am writing to support the nomination of Dr. Russell Lang, associate professor of special education and executive director of Texas State University's autism clinic, for this recognition of his commitment to mentorship and teaching. I first met Dr. Lang in 2013 during a new student orientation for the autism/applied behavior analysis master's concentration at Texas State. During this meeting, he conveyed his passion and support for research - challenging all students to contribute to our field through peer-reviewed publication and offering his guidance throughout the process to anyone sincerely interested.

Several weeks into my first semester in his courses, Dr. Lang asked to meet to discuss my plans after graduation. He explained that he felt I was capable of pursuing a PhD in the field and shared with me the success that his previous students had achieved - many going on to study at top-ranking doctoral programs nationally and internationally. Dr. Lang invited me to participate in an independent study class, a course which he volunteers to teach that is devoted to creating opportunities for students to participate in and conduct research.

After reviewing the literature, I presented Dr. Lang with a research proposal designed to replicate and extend a previous study involving a communication intervention. He was very supportive and provided crucial feedback throughout the entire process, teaching at every opportunity. (In the first edited draft of the manuscript he returned to me, he included comments with almost every edit, explaining the rationale behind them.) The study was published in the *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*.

Additionally, Dr. Lang has provided me with opportunities to participate on a grant supporting intervention research, present at conferences, network with colleagues, and serve as a peer reviewer for an academic journal. I have personally benefited from Dr. Lang's mentorship, but I also know that he includes as many of his students as possible in research and other scientific activities - even when it would be easier and faster to do it himself. I was recently accepted into the doctoral program of my choice and awarded a fellowship with full funding - something that would not have been possible, nor would I have considered pursuing, without Dr. Lang's mentorship. I am aware of at least eight other recent students who have been accepted into PhD programs in the field, due in no small part to his assistance.

In summary, I feel very fortunate (as do many of his other current and former students) that I have been able to learn from Dr. Lang's leadership on so many activities that are critical to success and further advancing our field. Through these experiences, I have learned to think scientifically and disseminate research in a way that would not have been possible without his help.

Very sincerely,



Katherine Ledbetter-Cho