



Community College
of Allegheny County

NORTH CAMPUS

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18 December 2019

Dear Selection Committee:

With confidence I recommend Alexander Sawicki to attend Boston University as a transfer student. I have known Alexander through my capacity as a faculty instructor in the computer and data analytics department at the Community College of Allegheny County. Alex was a lively, contributing member in both my introductory data analytics course in the fall of 2018 and my second level python programming course in the spring of 2019.

As a high school student dual enrolled in post-secondary courses at CCAC, his presence was somewhat of an anomaly compared to the typical student our institution serves. Alex, however, adapted to the academic and social environment of the college with adroitness and confidence. He was certainly prepared academically to cope with the workload of the intro data course which is designed to be project based and encourage student exploration. He approached the rigors of the second level python course with tenacity and consistent effort.

For his final project in the intro data course, Alex chose the only international research topic in his class section (and he was only the second student to do so in any course I've taught at CCAC). His analysis targeted patterns of country-level GDP changes over the past 20 years. Prior to arriving at his GDP project, in fact, Alex tinkered with an unrelated but equally unique topic: historical data related to the overlapping ancestries of various lineages of the British nobility--a subject that sits distinctly apart from the typical present-day focused research interests of essentially all my other students.

Alex's strength as an emerging python programmer lies in his willingness to maintain grit when undertaking technical projects that involve overcoming platform-specific technical faults. For example, to explore "scraping" data from ordinary web pages using a python program, students were required to configure a handful of related development software packages on their computers--a task that often involves overcoming one or more versioning or comparability errors.

I remember that Alex's laptop required several additional layers of configuration to enable the required packages and was throwing an unusual error that required extra hacking. After 45 or so minutes of hunting down solutions to his issues online and even attempting a few unsuccessful fixes before quashing the last bug, Alex demeanor did not shake from his usual friendly and open aura. He remained pleasant to work with and happily continued on the project after fixing his bugs.

The tenacity Alexander demonstrated in my python class is uncommon in my experience training 100+ new programmers per year; many folks new to coding grow agitated in the face of errors relating to configurations and software setup, and almost all show signs of discouragement that can be very dampening to a class.

I believe that the skills which enabled Alex to persevere through python problems are cross-applicable to many related academic domains and form the cornerstone of my confidence in sharing my recommendation for his admittance to Boston University.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eric Darsow". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Eric C Darsow
Faculty instructor, Computer department
Community College of Allegheny County