

June 29, 2021

To: ACU Tenure and Promotion Committee

I am most pleased to write in support of Dr. Sarah Easter for promotion to tenure at Abilene Christian University. As her dissertation supervisor and now as her colleague and co-author, I will focus my letter of support on her research and scholarship.

I have known Sarah since September 2012 when she joined the doctoral program in International Management & Organization at the Gustavson School of Business at the University of Victoria. I was also a newcomer to the school having left INSEAD to take up a joint appointment between the business school and the Centre for Asia-Pacific Initiatives as the Jarislowski East Asia Chair. As part of my teaching assignment, I was asked to teach the principal seminar for doctoral students titled “Foundations of Management Research.” The seminar was designed to help students build a strong foundation for their doctoral studies in the field of management. In addition, the course provided the students with training and practice in various aspects of the research process, including writing literature reviews, developing constructs and hypotheses, and reviewing others’ work. In short, it was a tough seminar meant to make sure that the students knew what they were getting into in pursuing a PhD in management studies. Many of the students were overwhelmed and even a bit unsure as to whether they had made the right choice for themselves in pursuing doctoral studies, but Sarah was not daunted by the demands of the course nor the subject matter. She stood out from the other students as one who was fully committed to being a scholar. After having spent four years prior to the program in industry—one of which were overseas in Vietnam, she was excited to delve deep into theory and research design and took on each assignment with interest, thoughtfulness, and zeal such that I have rarely seen in first year graduate students.

Indeed, Sarah rapidly distinguished herself as a serious student passionate in her research interests to understand and better inform how people can work together across differences and differentiated contexts to help solve the world’s most pressing social challenges. Sarah has never lost sight of this goal. As her dissertation supervisor, I know first-hand of Sarah’s integrity and devotion to her path. Her dissertation—*Homelessness Through Different Lenses: Negotiating Multiple Meaning Systems in a Canadian Tri-sector Social Partnership*—is the best case in point of the embodiment of all that she believes in and what she is capable of

accomplishing. Her chosen topic—homelessness, her methodology and research design—ethnography, her scope—decidedly interdisciplinary (organizational behavior and sustainability) and her intention—to help such well-meaning partnerships overcome organizational challenges so that they can solve pressing societal problems, all align with her passion and career intent. Such a multi-site ethnographic study, involving in-depth interviews and participant observation was a lot to take on as a doctoral student. And to be frank, most would have gone down a much easier route both in terms of data collection and publication facility opting for the more common quantitative studies large scale survey analyses. But such dissertations rarely provide the kind of real-world insight of the sort as found in qualitative studies such as Sarah's. Rather, Sarah's provides deep understanding of the interplay between culture and context in the collaboration and integration of organizational activities that provide an invaluable source of data, observations, and process knowledge that will serve her throughout her career.

You may ask why out of six refereed publications, why then has Sarah only been able to publish one article from her dissertation so far? To a large extent, this is due to the bias towards quantitative studies in business and management especially in the top journals. And Sarah has set her site high for publications. Having served as Deputy Editor of the Journal of International Business Studies for six years, I can attest to the nature of this bias as being both conceptual and structural. The former cause is due to a bias toward scientific objectivity. The latter is because even though the management and organization field has been slowly opening to qualitative studies including ethnography, editorial boards of top journals just don't have many reviewers who are skilled in reviewing qualitative articles. Opening a field to a diversity of methods and interdisciplinary perspectives takes maturity of the field, infrastructure, and time. Now, after some 50 + years we can say the management field has reached a certain amount of maturity. As far as infrastructure, much progress has been made to widen the research expertise of editorial boards to include deputy editors, associate editors, and area editors who are not only open to, but schooled in alternative research methods. And, with each year additions are made to the editorial review board of scholars coming from more diverse research traditions. So, the future looks bright for Sarah's type of research offerings. There has never been a better time for the power of richness from case studies, ethnographies, and a wide range of other types of qualitative research to surface and contribute meaningfully to management studies.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Mary Yoko Brannen', with a stylized, flowing script.

Mary Yoko Brannen

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