

November 17, 2004

Biocomplexity Faculty Search Committee
c / o Prof. Rob de Ruyter van Steveninck
Department of Physics
Indiana University
Swain Hall West 117
Bloomington IN 47405-7105

Dear Professor de Ruyter van Steveninck,

I am writing in regard to Dr. Cynthia Gibas's application for a faculty position in your department. I have been a colleague of Dr. Gibas's since she joined the Fralin Biotechnology Center at Virginia Tech almost four years ago. She has brought important new expertise to the Department of Biology and the Center, being the first bioinformatics expert to be hired on campus. She is currently completing her third year as an Assistant Professor in our department.

Dr. Gibas has established an active research program that currently consists of two graduate students and several undergraduates. She has developed a number of fruitful collaborations both on campus, for example with Dr. Khidir Hilu working at the leading edge of molecular phylogenetics, and at other institutions, as with Dr. Jennifer Weller at GMU on generating and interpreting microarray data. Dr. Gibas has been working hard to secure funding for this work, and has come very close at NSF and currently has a NIH grant pending. With numerous research articles submitted or in preparation, her research program is clearly poised to take off in the coming year.

Dr. Gibas is also a dedicated teacher, both in the research laboratory and in the classroom/teaching laboratory. This past fall I was asked to provide a peer review of her teaching in BIOL4075/5075, Bioinformatics Methods, a course that was offered at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. The graduate students participate in an additional on-line discussion forum that allows for a more in-depth examination of the material, for example, through analysis of articles from the current literature. With this course, Dr. Gibas has provided much-needed instruction in an important and rapidly-evolving area of the life sciences. She is clearly devoted to her teaching and her students, going to great lengths to help them understand her lectures, developing new web-based learning tools, and investing enormous energy in the accompanying computer lab. Her course web site is packed with information, yet is well-organized, providing easy-to-find information relevant to the lecture (such as her PowerPoint slides), as well as links to web sites that are to be accessed during the lab. Dr. Gibas is well-versed in the most current software and extremely knowledgeable regarding database resources. She therefore provides students with information and experience that is directly relevant to their own work. This same commitment to students is also evident in her research laboratory. A major concern as she contemplates moving to another institution is that her graduate and undergraduate students suffer as little disruption to their work and financial support as possible.

I was sorry to hear that Dr. Gibas has started looking for other positions, while I also understand the situation in which she now finds herself. Bioinformatics on the Virginia Tech campus, and elsewhere, has evolved rapidly in the past several years; here it has included establishment of the Virginia Bioinformatics Institute, which has had a rather uneven relationship with the main campus. I think it is fair to say that bioinformatics has not been a priority for the traditional departments such as Biology and I can see that Dr. Gibas has remained somewhat isolated in her current position. The faculty opening in your department appears to offer a much better environment in which to establish her research career. Therefore, as much as I would hate to see her leave, I would like to offer my strong support for her application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B Winkel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter "B" being particularly large and stylized.

Brenda S.J. Winkel
Professor