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Dear Prof. Brun,

Gavin Conant has asked me to write in support of his application for a tenure-track position in Systems Biology/Microbiology at IU. I am more than happy to do so. Gavin is a superb scientist with excellent ideas who is more than ready to start running his own lab. Recruiting him will be a significant coup for any university trying to develop its research program in systems biology.

Gavin has only been in my lab for 10 months (Jan-Oct 2005) but already he has had a huge and very positive impact. Prior to coming to Dublin, he was a graduate student of Andreas Wagner at UNM, and then took a short-term postdoctoral position with Peter Stadler in Leipzig. This background has given him a strong grounding in the principles of molecular evolution and protein structural evolution. He also has a very solid knowledge of methods of phylogenetic analysis, particularly likelihood, from time he spent as an undergrad working with Paul Lewis at UNM. The result is that, as well as working on his own projects, Gavin is full of constructive and knowledgeable suggestions and has been a great contributor to our lab meetings.

In terms of his own projects Gavin is very independent. One of his primary interests is in the evolution of networks, and in my lab he has analyzed how different types of network (protein-protein interactions, transcription factor/target networks, and gene co-expression networks) became subfunctionalized following whole-genome duplication in yeast. This project was entirely Gavin's own idea and simply made use of some basic data on yeast gene duplications that was available in my lab. Our manuscript about this is undergoing peer review at *Nature Genetics*. In my lab, Gavin is currently looking at evolution of the yeast metabolic network and again the ideas are almost 100% his own.

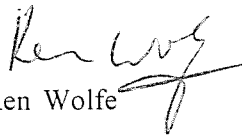
I have had the privilege of supervising many very talented postdocs and PhD students, and Gavin is among the best of them. I do not think that anyone in my lab's 13-year history has worked more independently than he does. Gavin has a remarkable ability to work quickly, but accurately and in the right way so that his analyses do not need to be repeated. He is also great at bringing things to completion: in my experience other postdocs will often begin a project, obtain 90% of the results and then become distracted by something else before they get around to finishing off the project. It takes determination and management skills to get

all the necessary ducks in a row before a manuscript can be submitted, and Gavin has these qualities in spades.

The only criticism I could make of Gavin, and it is a minor one, is that he can sometimes appear arrogant. I mention this only because this might be your first impression of him at an interview. However, Gavin is far from arrogant. Rather, he is young, he speaks loudly, he knows a lot and he is full of ideas. If he can think of a way to make your project better he will make that suggestion. If he thinks there is a flaw in something a seminar speaker has said, he will ask that awkward question. He could perhaps be a bit more tactful with the suggestions, but they are almost always good ones. Once you get to know him a little you realize that Gavin is just eager to help others in the lab, very willing to do so, and he has the patience that is needed to be a good teacher. Most importantly, he accepts criticism of his own work and he takes the suggestions of others on board.

Gavin is clearly at the stage where he is ready to start running his own lab. I will be sorry to lose him from my group, but I know that he is going to go places and I look forward to seeing him make a name for himself in science.

Yours sincerely,


Ken Wolfe