



Northeastern

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

Dear Search Committee:

It is a pleasure for me to write this letter of recommendation for Dr. Jessica Reeves Newton, a graduate student in our Psychology Department who is now finishing her postdoctoral fellowship at MIT and seeking an Assistant Professorship in your Department. What follows is essentially the letter I wrote recommending her for the postdoctoral position in the first place. It makes all the arguments I want to make here. I have followed her career since, but I will let her explain the details of that research to you.

Despite the fact that I have now taken a college-level administrative position, I was and remain a neuroscientist. I also was the Department Chair when we recruited then Ms. Newton and when her advisor, and my good friend, Dr. Alex Skavenski, died of cancer. Dr. Skavenski was an electrophysiologist interested in neuroplasticity of visual cortical structures. So, it was with some concern that I watched her switch to working with Professor Rhea Eskew in psychophysics. But all of this worked out and yielded an excellent Ph.D. and a substantial NRSA-funded postdoctoral fellowship. In addition, Ms. Newton collaborated with Dr. Robert Sikes, an anatomist in another college at Northeastern University. I too collaborate with Dr. Sikes on another anatomical problem (my field is the neurobiology of dopamine and reward/addiction processes). Finally, I have sat in seminars with Ms. Newton and gone to Society for Neuroscience meetings with her as a member of my department. I have watched her explain her scholarship, discussed (as an outsider) the ideas that underlay her experiments, and saw them come to fruition. Thus I feel that I know Dr. Newton as well as possible considering that I am not a vision neuroscientist. I also have hired a number of assistant professors in and out of my general field. As Dean, that experience has expanded 20 fold as I now see such operations across an entire College of Arts and Sciences. It is against all of this background that I highly recommend to you Dr. Newton.

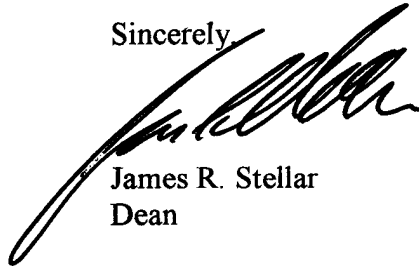
I can tell you at the start that Dr. Newton was a highly able, productive, dedicated, and insightful graduate student. It appears to me that she has not changed, except to get better. Without arrogance she had a way of deciding what is right for her to study in the field and doggedly pursuing it. She did this with plasticity after visual system lesions at both an electrophysiological (with Skavenski) and anatomical (with Sikes) level and in

psychophysics (with Eskew). She pursued cross modal transfer questions, which I sometimes felt were a long-shots, but her approach worked. I take this as a sign of something that I feel about Dr. Newton at a gut-level, that she is really knows the literature and has deep ideas about it. Others who are more in the field that I will have to comment on the details of her science, but I can say from my interactions with them at national meetings, they agree with me that Dr. Newton is outstanding.

I wish Dr. Newton had been interested in my sub-field of Neuroscience. I would have recruited her in a heart-beat for a postdoctoral fellowship in my own laboratory (which continues even as I serve as an administrator). She is exactly the kind of productive, intelligent, hard-working, and sensible person I want around me. She is also a very nice person who always contributes to, rather than detracts from the social organization that underlies any laboratory. She had a large set-backs, such as when Professor Skavenski, her advisor, died a bit more than half way through her program. But she pulled herself together, worked with Eskew, and kept going. I know how much Professor Skavenski's loss meant to her so I know that she has a great deal of courage and quiet determination. On the basis of her ability and her motivation, on the basis of her insights and her skill, and on the basis of her love for the field, I expect her to have an excellent career in the field and to make us all proud to have supported her. Now that she is out on the Assistant Professor market, I feel the same. I wish we could hire her back, but we tend to not do that for reasons of in-breeding. That I was always and remain interested in having her in my own operation is perhaps the best recommendation I can give you. As Dean, with Dr. Newton on my staff, I know I would get from her the best in research, teaching, citizenship, and integration of all of these areas.

If you have any questions, please contact me at the above numbers or by e-mail (J.Stellar@neu.edu).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James R. Stellar', written over a horizontal line.

James R. Stellar
Dean