

University at Buffalo
State University of New York

Department of Computer Science and Engineering

February 25, 2013

Faculty Search Committee
Department of Computer Science and Engineering
School of Engineering and Computer Science
Oakland University
2200 N. Squirrel Road
Rochester, MI 48309-4401

Dear Faculty Search Committee:

I am happy to provide a letter of reference for Dr. Liyu Zhang, who obtained his PhD under the guidance of my colleague Professor Alan Selman in summer 2007. I have known him since 1999 as a theory graduate student and TA for some of my courses. I am an Associate Professor with long happy service at UB.

Liyu has done an excellent job of both gardening the papers that come out of his thesis, and separating himself from his advisor and some co-workers who are also highly talented. He has obtained a small NSF CCF theory grant on his own—those are not easy to get. He is also branching out into algorithms for some practical scientific problems, including DNA sequencing.

Of the two most recent papers, the IPL one achieves a technical extension of his thesis work that I posed as a query shortly before his defense. The other, with Fu and Li, is on a different topic, and was accepted to an international conference that is breaking into the top 10 in the field. The importance of the class NE at the heart of their paper has been raised by recent breakthrough results of Ryan Williams, ones that also indicate how difficult it is to get results at this level of computational complexity. The joint papers intersecting his thesis appeared in truly major conferences and journals.

I am not able to judge the significance of the large teaching-infrastructure grant project he directs, nor of course have I seen his teaching at UT Brownsville. In 2007 I wrote: “He was a cracker-jack TA for me, able to further my objectives from inherent knowledge of them and memory of when I taught, not from itemized directions. One year I remember I had complaints from students about English, and it was the other TA a more native English speaker, not he.” My following words are just as valid today: “He is on track to be a good general scientist and colleague, not just a technician, and he has acquired good balanced perspective from being in this country so long. Liyu’s spoken English and listening comprehension in conversation are up to native-speaker standards—the difference is that he is more reserved, less voluble, but still a clear speaker.”

In sum, I would support his having Associate rank with tenure at Oakland: he has both a funded research track record and projects in teaching that alone would be considered tenure-worthy at Adrian College, for example. I will be happy to answer any further questions you may have.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Kenneth W. Regan