Dear Faculty Mentor of the Year Award Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the current and former postdoctoral researchers in Dr. Andy Michel’s lab in order to strongly recommend him the 2018 Faculty Mentor of the Year. Dr. Michel is someone whose reputation as an excellent mentor is renowned, and with whom we all feel fortunate to work during our postdoctoral training. His unwavering support of our career goals, enthusiasm for our research objectives, and effort to maintain a positive laboratory environment propel his mentees to success in their endeavors in the lab and beyond.

Dr. Michel has been able to achieve a notable balance between providing support to trainees and allowing us the freedom to pursue our own goals. Despite his many responsibilities as PI, Interim Associate Chair of the Department of Entomology, Associate Director of the Center for Applied Plant Sciences, and leadership in professional societies and working groups, Dr. Michel makes active advising of his trainees a priority. Through regular meetings and informal communication he fosters a true partnership in our research projects, allowing us the freedom to explore avenues of interest while providing sound guidance regarding best practices and integration with our broader research goals. This guidance is particularly valuable when projects take unexpected turns- Dr. Michel has been critical in helping each of us navigate research obstacles. He also encourages us to collaborate with external research groups and write grant applications, which is particularly valuable. For example, one postdoc shared that with Dr. Michel’s support she developed preliminary results for an independent project, with which she was able to apply for external funding. I was invited by Dr. Michel to contribute to a large internationally collaborative grant application through the NSF, and also used preliminary data I produced under his advisement to apply for a USDA Postdoctoral Fellowship.

Beyond his investment in our research success, Dr. Michel consistently makes supporting our career goals more broadly a priority. He ensures at the start of a working relationship that he understands our career goals in order to best contribute to their success. As a current postdoc notes, upon assessing her career goals “Dr. Michel has encouraged me to pursue funding opportunities through USDA-NIFA and involved me in collaborative projects within the lab and beyond the lab. Dr. Michel shares his grant review experiences with me to develop strong and competitive grants. Furthermore, he also helps us to develop effective writing skills for a successful proposal or manuscript.” He has frequently encouraged us to pursue opportunities for career development even at the expense of his own research program, as when he supported my acceptance of an adjunct teaching position for a semester in order to further my goal of attaining a more teaching-oriented faculty position, or his facilitation of teaching by others at the OSU-Agricultural Technical Institute. Dr. Michel also supports our attendance at annual meetings in order to network and build collaborations with external colleagues. This support lead one postdoc to a leadership position in the Association of Indian Entomologists in North America and also to organize a symposium at the Entomological Society of America branch meeting.

Dr. Michel combines his active support of our career development success with encouragement to maintain a healthy work-life balance that ultimately makes his trainees more energized in our pursuits. Through his own example and advocacy, Dr. Michel makes it clear that part of being a successful researcher is taking the time to address your own wellness and responsibilities away from the lab. He has been particularly helpful to those in the lab experiencing major life events, such as international transitions and family additions. His holistic support of trainees has resulted in successful mentorship of 12 trainees in 11 years, including four postdocs (two current and two former). We all whole-heartedly support this nomination for Faculty Mentor of the Year.