



November 25, 2014

To whom it may concern,

It is a true pleasure to provide my highest recommendation for **Joshua Thomas** as he is considered for a position with your organization. I have known Josh for the entirety of his undergraduate career at SMU, including teaching him in two different courses. Through all of my many interactions with Josh over the past year, I have come to know him as a student and person of the very highest caliber. With his outstanding work ethic, natural intelligence, and creative spirit, he will be a substantial asset to your organization.

During the Spring 2014 semester, Josh was enrolled in Introduction to Engineering Design (KNW 2300), a multidisciplinary, team-based, project-oriented design course for first- and second-year engineering students at SMU. Each team works to build an autonomous robotics system capable of navigating a playing field, locating a water well, testing the well's turbidity and salinity, and developing a remediation plan. Early in each semester, teams are usually a little shell-shocked at the complexity of the challenge before them. However, one of my first memories of Josh in that class were from the beginning of the project design phase where he was leading his team through some design sketches on a whiteboard and talking through the strengths and weaknesses of the various designs. It was then that I had my first clue that Josh and his team were going to be a "force to be reckoned with" during the end-of-semester competition. He demonstrated not only keen engineering design intuition, but he also showed us that he was an outstanding team leader. However, he did not attempt to exert any typical positional leadership tactics such as dictating to other what he wanted them to do. Quite the opposite, Josh very diplomatically and in a servant-leadership style was hands-on in the design and implementation of their robot and helped each team-member's ideas to be heard and considered. My initial instincts were correct – going in to the competition, Josh's team was the team to beat!

Currently, Josh is enrolled in my Data Structures course (CSE 2341), and I am happy to report that his talents do not lie only in mechanical engineering. He is pursuing a minor in computer science as well, for which Data Structures is a required course. It has a reputation of being one of the most challenging and time consuming courses for computer science majors and minors. That hasn't swayed Josh though; he isn't afraid of a challenge and doesn't back away from hard work. In this course as well, he has been a top performer throughout the entire semester and I am confident that he will earn one of the highest grades in the course. But, that's one of the great things about Josh – he isn't in it for the A. He genuinely wants to learn the material and skills. The outstanding grades are simply a by-product of his hard work and desire for mastery.

On a personal note, Josh and I have chatted many times about careers, the future of computer science as a discipline, his side design projects, and countless other things. He is an outstanding student in the truest sense, and I hold him in the highest regard. I'm quite certain that he is the type of students that faculty members secretly wish filled their classrooms and labs. I have no doubt that his curiosity, creative spirit, and intellectual giftedness will take him very far during and after college. Given the above, I have no reservations in giving Josh my highest recommendation. Should you have additional questions, please feel free to contact me at [mfonten@lyle.smu.edu](mailto:mfonten@lyle.smu.edu).

Very sincerely,

Mark Fontenot  
Clinical Professor of Computer Science and Engineering  
Director of Introduction to Engineering Design Program