



October 19, 2020

SHAPE America  
ATTN: Mabel Lee Awards Committee

RE: Dr. Andrew Colombo-Dougovito

It is my pleasure to provide this letter of support for Dr. Andrew (Andy) Colombo-Dougovito in consideration for SHAPE America's *Mabel Lee Award*. I have known Andy for nearly seven years, collaborating with him on research investigating the physical activity preferences of adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), collaborating with him on Physical Education Teacher Education efforts between our two universities, and working with him on National Consortium for Physical Education for Individuals with Disabilities (NCPEID) initiatives. From these experiences and knowledge of his published research, I believe Andy to be an outstanding young professional who has firmly established himself as a young leader in the field of adapted physical activity (APA). Andy is a self-directed researcher, a skilled educator, and a steward of service who is poised to impact the field of APA for years to come.

With regard to scholarship, Andy has established himself as researcher who is both collaborative and thoughtful in his scholarly approach. Across his 19 referred publications, 11 manuscripts in review or preparation, 3 book chapters and nearly 50 professional presentations, it is clear to see Andy's research line focused around motor skill acquisition and physical activity participation for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). While his curriculum vita catalogs these works, it does not provide insight on how this research has been conducted. Andy believes deeply in participatory research as well as the self-reflective inquiry engaged in by researchers and participants in order to better understand a problematic situation and collectively change it for the better. This pattern of research methodologies demonstrates Andy's thoughtful research inquiry as well as his commitment to the community of children and adults with ASD with whom he engages for research. This collaborative approach can also be seen in Andy's publications as 15 of his 19 are co-authored with colleagues and students. Andy has been recognized for this scholarly work receiving the *Top Paper Award* from the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Commission on the Stat of Women, and the *Friedman Young Professional Award* by the International Federation for Adapted Physical Activity (IFAPA). In addition, Andy has established himself as a strong multidisciplinary collaborator with colleagues across the University of North Texas (e.g., external grant applications with J. Lee and T. Zhang, and Mpofo et al.); the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex (e.g., publications and grant application with S. Dillon); and the United States (e.g., research and publications with S. Healy and J. Blagrave). As Mabel Lee's impact extended beyond the University of Nebraska, so does Andy's impact extend beyond North Texas and beyond the confines of the APA discipline.

My interactions with Andy have also allowed me to witness his dedication to teaching and his students. Like Mabel Lee, Andy has consistently demonstrated positive professional dispositions as well as a caring demeanor with his students. As an Assistant Professor at the University of North Texas (UNT), Andy has taught six different courses and more than 500 students over the past four years. Through this teaching and mentoring of university students, he has demonstrated his ability to deliver quality instruction as well as inspire independent inquiry as he helps students connect learning in the classroom/lab to “real life” professional situations and research. As an example, Andy and I hosted a joint activity between the UNT and Texas Woman’s University, wherein students from both Kinesiology programs gathered for a movie viewing and post-viewing discussion. During the post-viewing discussion, Andy challenged the students to critically reflect on the life and physical activity challenges faced by individuals in the movie and whether those challenges would exist in today’s society and within our local community. He guided students in a manner that allowed them to come to their own realizations about current community constraints and their own professional practice. Andy also actively recruits students to “step outside their comfort zone” to engage in applied APA field work as well as research. Andy is supportive of young undergraduate and graduate scholars; and is currently serving on four doctoral committees and chairing the research and/or thesis of seven master’s students. He has also actively sought external funding to support graduate students including our National Institutes of Health R15 application entitled, *Physical Activity of Autistics Adults* (PA<sup>3</sup>). This grant application included full funding for one doctoral graduate research assistant for the duration of her/his doctoral program, partial funding for two graduate student assistants for the duration of the grant, key opportunities for the graduate students to be actively engaged in the research process, and significant opportunities for Andy to mentor and teach these young scholars how to be skilled educators and researchers.

Andy’s potential within the profession is not limited to his teaching and scholarly contributions, it also extends to the professional service that he provides from the University level to the international level. As a young professional, Andy is the Chair-Elect for the Adapted Physical Education/Activity Special Interest Group (SIG) for SHAPE America and has served as a board member for NCPEID since 2017. In addition, he has consistently served as a reviewer for SHAPE America, NCPEID and the North American Federation of Adapted Physical Activity as well as multiple professional journals. Andy currently serves an APA expert and consultant to the Kristin Farmer Autism Center in Denton, TX and as a consultant to UNT Workplace Inclusion and Sustainable Employment that supports the employment and inclusion of individuals with disabilities at UNT. In my opinion, his professional commitment and service to the profession exceeds that of most young professionals and is reflective of the leadership and service modeled by Mabel Lee.

In conclusion, I believe Dr. Colombo-Dougovito to be a highly competent young scholar, educator and leader who has the potential to make significant and lasting contributions to the field of APA. Additionally, I believe Andy’s accomplishments over the past few years meet, and exceed, the criteria set forth in the *Mabel Lee Award*. As you can tell from my accolades, I believe Andy to be a worthy recipient of this SHAPE America award, and very highly recommend him. I appreciate your time and efforts in considering him for this honor. If you have any questions or would like more information regarding Andy, please feel free to contact me at [sdillon@twu.edu](mailto:sdillon@twu.edu).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Suzanna R. Dillon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial 'S'.

Suzanna R. Dillon, Ph.D., C.A.P.E.  
Associate Professor of APA/E and Project Nexus Director  
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