It is with great pleasure that I write this letter of recommendation in support of Bruce Wayne’s application to the doctoral program in experimental psychology at the University of Gotham City. As I describe more fully below, I believe Bruce would be a valuable addition to your academic community, and I urge you to give his application very serious consideration.

I met Bruce in the Fall of 2004, shortly after I had started working at Western Washington University. Bruce worked in my lab for approximately a year, and also took a senior-level seminar course with me. Although I worked with many doctoral students during my time at the University of Southern California, I have met few students who are more prepared for doctoral level work than Bruce.

I first met Bruce when he inquired about the possibility of working in my lab. Given that his interests lie more in the realm of social psychology, and my own work is more cognitive in nature, I was initially uncertain whether it would be a good combination. However, Bruce thoroughly dispelled my doubts. Bruce's work with me centered on a project involving category learning. The goal of the project was to explain a particular language phenomenon by appealing to theoretical principles from the category learning literature. Bruce was actively involved in all aspects of the project, from the initial review of the literature and discussion of research questions, to the design and development of the experimental paradigm, to the data collection and analysis, and finally writing the paper. For his significant contributions to the project, Bruce is second author on that paper, which is under review at the journal Statistically Significant Findings in Psychology. I should emphasize that Bruce's contributions involved both the inspiration and perspiration aspects of research. In particular, he played a central role in the design of the experiments itself. His questions and concerns led to several major improvements in the design, and I must say that I view these experiments as the technically best experiments I have carried out in my career. Even as we were writing the paper up, Bruce continued to ask probing, insightful questions regarding the analysis and interpretation of the data, again with the result that the quality of the work was improved. It should be kept in mind that Bruce was still an undergraduate at this point!

My experience with Bruce as a student is consistent with the impression I have from his work in my lab. He was a student in my psychological theory course, which is a senior-level seminar focusing on "big questions" in psychology, related to the way we do research and the way psychology interacts with religion, culture, and politics. Bruce asked the same sort of insightful questions in that class that he asked in my lab, and consistently demonstrated an ability to think about complex issues in a deep, reflective way. If he had any shortcoming in that class, it was that he sometimes was overly ambitious and tried to take on issues that were too big and too complex for us to address in a single course.
I would also like to mention two characteristics of Bruce that I have observed along the way that I believe will serve him well in graduate school. The first is that Bruce is very mature. I've had long conversations with him in which we discussed the challenges of surviving graduate school and the difficulties in obtaining an academic job. It is clear to me that he's given considerable thought to these issues. He's not applying to a doctoral program because he doesn't know what else to do; he's applying because he knows that is what he wants to do. His experience in the masters program at Jersey City College seems to have only cemented his resolve. In my experience, emotional maturity is almost as important as intellectual ability as a predictor of success in graduate school, and in that regard, Bruce is very promising indeed.

Second, in my experience Bruce is a highly effective communicator, although I have seen this primarily in the form of speaking. His speech is careful, measured, and clear, and it's obvious that he thinks before opening his mouth (which, alas, even I sometimes forget to do). This is clearly a valuable skill, both in terms of scholarship (e.g., conference presentations) and teaching. As with maturity, I have typically found that strong speaking and writing skills are a good predictor of success in graduate school.

Overall, then, I have no hesitation in recommending Bruce for admission to your doctoral program. I believe he would be both a pleasure to work with, and an asset to your program. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any additional questions.

Cordially,

Eleanor Gibson
Professor of Psychology
University of Pennsylvania