



WASEDA UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF CIVIL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING

4-1 Okubo 3, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 169-8555 JAPAN

Telephone: +81-3-5286-8296 Facsimile: +81-3-5286-8296

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To: Future Earth Coasts Fellows Selection Committee

It is with great pleasure that I write this reference letter of reference to support the application of my former student, Mr. Ven Paolo Valenzuela, for the Future Earth Coasts Fellow. My name is Miguel Esteban and I am a Professor of Coastal Engineering at the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering of Waseda University, in Tokyo, Japan. Formerly I was Associate Professor at the University of Tokyo, where I was supervisor of Mr. Valenzuela during his master course (and co-supervisor during his PhD).

Let me start by unequivocally stating that **Mr. Valenzuela is one of the most exceptional PhD candidates I have encountered within my time in academia** (I would describe him as being within the **top 5% of PhD candidates** I have ever encountered, a truly exceptional individual). In this sense, Mr. Valenzuela has already published many journal papers and other manuscripts, which demonstrate his abilities and commitment to academia. Not only did this allow him to finish his PhD within three years, but at the time of graduation he already had an h-factor similar to that of many academic staff with years of experience (I just checked now, and according to Scopus he is at h=18).

I have known Paolo for around seven years now, from the time when we met during a post-disaster survey of the damage that took place after hurricane Haiyan in the Philippines. During this time, I was greatly impressed with Paolo's intellectual and technical abilities, and was trying to convince him to come to the University of Tokyo and study a masters and PhD. Prior to joining he was involved in many projects related to disaster risk management in the Philippines, and even participated in the Sendai Disaster Reduction Framework negotiations, which is a testament to his considerable abilities. I understand his previous job was very rewarding, though I finally succeed in convincing him to come to the University of Tokyo, and since then my faith in his abilities has only increased. At the time of his first interview to enter the master program many members of the committee were surprised that he was applying for the masters course rather than PhD, given that he sounded more like a PhD candidate (he would have been accepted, had he already had a masters, and I remember one member of the committee expressing disbelief that somebody without a masters already had such advanced thoughts).

Paolo is an incredibly knowledgeable individual, who is able to master a wide range of methodologies from different fields. Originally a social scientist, he has taught me much of the techniques that I nowadays employ from this field (so in that sense he has been my teacher, rather than the other way around). Since joining the University of Tokyo he has also taught himself how to use drones, and has become an expert at aerial mapping and photogrammetry, to the point that I asked him to teach one of my lectures on this subject, and has become an expert in the use of various statistical packages (such as SPSS, to name but a few of the skills he has picked up). His abilities are so significant that his actual PhD supervisor after I left the University of Tokyo, Dr. Onuki, invited him to teach an entire Master's level course (i.e. all 15 lectures) while he was only just starting his PhD.

In terms of research, Paolo participated in a wide range of activities at the University of Tokyo, being a leading member of many group field exercises (looking at post-tsunami reconstruction in the Tohoku area of northern Japan and Chile), and cooperating in the writing of journal papers for these exercises and others. Whenever he was present in such activities, I treated him as another member of staff rather than a student, given that he often knows as much as (if not more) than any other colleague. He is an excellent team worker, and also can quickly take the lead in many projects, understanding key points and developing appropriate methodologies, which seem to come effortlessly to him. For his own PhD research Paolo looked at awareness issues and disaster planning in the Philippines, writing several manuscripts on the topic.

All this goes to say how his research is having the highest impact, both at the academic, policy and social level. I can only expect that if he were to be selected as a Future Earth Coasts Fellow his research would continue to have significant impact on his country in particular, and other communities around the world. During his PhD, Dr. Valenzuela even worked with some of the local communities, which highlights how he thinks of his work as a holistic understanding and pro-active adaptation of those affected by sea level rise and other climate change issues.

In terms of character, Paolo is a very easy person to get along with, very cheerful, talkative and polite. He often helped other students in their research and projects, teaching many of them how to use drones. Thus, despite being a student, in many senses Paolo already acts like an established academic.

To conclude, I can recommend Paolo without reservations. He is one of the best students I have encountered in my career, not only in terms of intellectual ability but also other capacities, and I have no doubt that he will become one of future leading disaster risk and climate change adaptation philosophers. Hence, I recommend it wholeheartedly for a position at your institution.

Your sincerely,



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Miguel Esteban, Prof.
Dept. of Civil & Environmental Engineering
Waseda University
Okubo, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 169-8555, Japan
e-mail: esteban.fagan@gmail.com
Phone/Facsimile: +81-80-4026-7791