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To whom it may concern:

I am writing this letter in support of Loyola University Chicago's application to receive innovation credit for its STEP (Solutions to Environmental Problems) Program. STEP was originally created by Loyola's Center for Urban Environmental Research and Policy as an innovative opportunity for students to participate in engaged learning relating to real-world environmental challenges. It is now a regular course offering sponsored by Loyola's newly created Institute for Environmental Sustainability. STEP is open to students from all undergraduate schools and majors and features a unique pedagogy that blends lectures from faculty from many different disciplines with team-based student-run projects related to the theme of the course that session. Each team is supported by a faculty mentor as they work toward producing a tangible and practical product designed to address environmental concerns that students have participated in selecting.

STEP has been organized around three broad topics over its history: Energy (with an emphasis on Biodiesel), Food Systems, and Water. The course has not only proven to be extremely successful as a student educational experience, but has led to tangible changes in university operations that have moved from critical reflection toward purposeful action, a hallmark of the Ignatian pedagogy that Loyola embraces as a Jesuit institution. Two examples of student efforts that began as STEP projects and moved Loyola toward greater sustainability are Loyola's nationally recognized Biodiesel program and a successful student-led effort to ban the sale of bottled water on campus.

I have been a faculty member and university administrator (now former) for three decades, and through much of that time, I and most of my colleagues have taught conventional lecture classes falling nearly entirely within disciplinary lines. As we have come to realize, while there is a place for this form of instruction, the educational experiences that light a fire within our students are those which deal with issues affecting their lives, which engage students directly in active learning, and which approach complex issues from inter- and multi-disciplinary perspectives. STEP has not only created opportunities for students to help create a more sustainable university and society, it has helped transform how I and other faculty define the learning outcomes of our classes and embrace a more holistic approach to our students' educational experience. Simply put, STEP has been perhaps the most exciting and innovative educational program I have encountered in my career.

Thank you for considering the request of Loyola University Chicago to receive innovation credit for the STEP program, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Frendreis".

John Frendreis
Professor of Political Science