Jeff Rances exemplifies the best the University has to offer. In his capacity to coordinate graduate admissions and recruitment, Jeff works effectively with diverse groups of faculty and students. His direct work with the Admissions and Recruitment Committee has made the processing of hundreds of applications a smooth process in order for the faculty to successfully recruit the most talented young women and men into the Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry. This year, he facilitated the processes by constructing/managing specific online tools distinct to the needs of the faculty which at times was difficult given the dynamic divisions within departmental boundaries. He worked tirelessly, beyond the regular 9-5 schedule, without being asked, in order for our department and for the University at large to make the first offers across the nation to top graduate recruits – many students acknowledge that UCSD was the first school they had heard from on their graduate admission offers. Because of his stellar and exceptional administrative efforts, during the 2009 admission cycle, the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry was one of the few graduate programs on our campus to exhibit a significant increase in graduate admissions at a time when most other graduate departments exhibited a decline in admissions. Last year, we had ~ 511 total applicants with 73 accepts, representing an increase of 42 applicants and 18 accepts compared with the prior year.

His efforts have expanded beyond the administrative processing of admissions through his personal approach in making our department and University an inclusive environment for a diverse population. He has a vested commitment to diversity and he has shown this through his outreach and recruitment efforts to bring underrepresented students to UCSD. For example, he has worked extensively with the Office of Graduate Studies and recently secured three fellowships from the Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate (AGEP) program, funded by the National Science Foundation in order to increase the acceptance of underrepresented students. These fellowships are highly competitive, and there are only a few slots available. He also provided crucial assistance in the nomination of two additional underrepresented students for San Diego Fellowships for which the students have been selected. The San Diego Fellowship Program aims to bring students who will make a significant contribution to the campus’ diversity. The AGEP fellowships represent approximately $48,000 in savings towards graduate student support. The San Diego Fellowships represent $50,000 in savings towards graduate student support. Additionally, he is working on a specific pilot program that will bring students together across disciplines for talks and workshops that will strive to improve climate and race-relations. The pilot program will also aim to assist in the retention of those traditionally underrepresented students by providing out-of-the-classroom training through mentorship for success in graduate study, research and beyond.

He has also taken initiative in contacting all admitted students and offering a personal connection to the program by providing “five star” customer service. His initiative has provided cost-effective results in that the department has saved over $30,000 in recruitment costs over the last two years. This has happened through his own personal commitment such as buying food from other vendors and literally “running around” to find the best deals in making the costs less expensive. He enlisted his colleagues to drive shuttles for prospective students instead of hiring expensive drivers during the recruitment events. He also went out of his way to negotiate with hotels rental costs. He also opted out from paid overtime in order not to exhaust funds available for recruitment which have resulted in exceptional recruitment activities as stated by many faculty.

His genuine goodwill has made the department a better place. We have heard from many prospective students on how appreciative they are for Jeff’s personal touch in making their stay the best as they compare our program to other top programs nationwide. Many have commented that their decision on graduate school was based on the quality of faculty, research and also the quality of staff support as provide by Jeff. Additionally, Jeff has made instrumental strides in organizing the graduate students into a community and making an important contribution to overall graduate student satisfaction. In recent departmental Town Hall meetings, current graduate students specifically indicated the importance of Jeff and his contribution to helping students in their overall well-being and morale.

Overall, Jeff’s hard work, dedication and “best interest at heart” makes him the best the University has to offer during difficult economic times. We are definitely honored and lucky to have him as an employee of the University and for this we hope that you will strongly consider selecting him as the Employee of the Year.