



Defining “Underrepresentation”

The Promising Scholars Award considers nominees “underrepresented” in graduate education in multiple ways:

- **Educational** backgrounds underrepresented in graduate education, which may include First Generation, attendance at an Historically Black College/University, Community College, Tribal School, Single-Gender College, etc.
- **Cultural** backgrounds underrepresented in graduate education, which refers to the broad range of experiences that shape a candidate’s perspective, expertise, and educational contributions. Culture cannot be explained solely based on race, gender, national origin, etc. so contextualizing the contributions in your [Letters of Support](#) helps the review committee to understand your program’s diversification effort and what voices may be underrepresented within your program/field. Here is a [guide](#) on social identities that may contribute to a candidate’s cultural background/experiences and could be referenced in context in the letter.
- **Geographic** backgrounds underrepresented in graduate education do not solely refer to the location of where a candidate is from (or a candidate’s international student status) but the ways in which a candidate’s location shaped their educational experiences and lends a new/different approaches/expertise to graduate education. Isolated rural areas, areas affected by conflict, areas impacted by extreme environmental events, or an area's history of treatment of a specific group are examples of different geographic backgrounds that may be considered underrepresented in your program.

Crafting Letters of Support

Unsure of what to prioritize in the 250-word limit in your [Letters of Support](#)? Please consider focusing on the following items to prioritize the academic excellence of your nominee:

- Highlighting *consistent* and/or *exemplary* examples of academic achievement and contextualizing in a sentence or two what makes this significant in your program/field
- Including a few sentences on how the candidate’s background enables them to bring a new or different approach to your program, *then* contextualizing the value of these contributions within your program/field
- Considering the ways in which a candidate’s professional or civic experiences relate to their academic excellence; highlighting skills/innovations, demonstrated commitments to diversity within the field, etc. can showcase the value of a candidate’s contributions to your program/field