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