



February 12, 2025

Dear Selection Committee:

I am delighted to nominate Ariel Lawrence for the **Graduate Emory Student Employee of the Year (SEOTY)**. Ariel is in her final year of the English PhD program at Emory University's Laney Graduate School. Ariel has held multiple positions on campus, including with the Emory Writing Center, as an instructor in the English Department, as an online curriculum designer for Emory Summer Programs, and with *Southern Spaces* in Emory's Center for Digital Scholarship. She is the recipient of the 2024-2025 James Weldon Johnson Institute PhD Completion Fellowship and is slated to graduate in May. While Ariel has made numerous contributions to Emory's academic and intellectual community through these various roles, I am writing today as her supervisor in her role as a Writing Specialist in the National Scholarships & Fellowships program (NS&FP) in Emory's Pathways Center. Specifically, I am nominating her in recognition of her extraordinary contributions to undergraduate mentorship and to the university's strategic goals to build a thriving, innovative, community of care.

Ariel joined NS&FP as a Writing Specialist in fall 2022. The Writing Specialist position in NS&FP is a part time role for graduate students who have an interest in developing and refining their skills in editing, providing writing feedback, and advising high-achieving students with an interest in nationally competitive awards. In addition, Writing Specialists help support administrative and operational projects in our program. We were thrilled to bring her on board because she already had extensive experience as a writing instructor and tutor, and her academic focus on black women's lifewriting meant she entered the role with a sophisticated understanding of rhetorical techniques, the art of revision, and theories of identity, self-making and creative practices.

Professionalism, Effective Communication & Interpersonal Skills

Ariel's skills as a communicator and collaborator have made her an essential and reliable member of the NS&FP team and a trusted program representative at the campus, regional, and national level. Ariel jumped into the work of supporting our growing cohort of Fulbright applicants, assisting with interviews and follow-up advising almost immediately after joining the team. In the five months that followed, she helped support nearly all of the endorsed awards in our portfolio, either as an advisor or on behind-the-scenes administrative projects. During that first year, Ariel became an astute editor of my work, including endorsement and nomination letters for prestigious opportunities like the Marshall, Rhodes, and Truman Scholarships; a kind but firm advisor and coach, especially to early career undergraduates; and she was consistently willing to jump in to represent the program at an event or assist a colleague with a project. This included serving as a program assistant at the 2023 National Association of Fellowships Advisors Biennial Conference in New Orleans, for which I served as conference chair.

Impact

Ariel's work to support students through the whole life cycle of the fellowship application process has had a major impact on the number of students we serve and the number of applicants and recipients of nationally competitive awards. Over the past year and a half, Ariel has deepened her involvement with NS&FP, working on projects that demonstrate her deep commitment to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, particularly by helping to demystify higher education for first-generation, limited income, and historically underrepresented undergraduate students. She has taken the lead on several aspects of curriculum development for our highly popular Fulbright Bootcamp grant-writing program, helping to grow our Fulbright applicant pool by nearly 30 percent (from 53 to 75) between 2022 and 2024, and leading to a record number of Fulbright recipients (23 grants offered) in 2024!

Leadership

As part of the Fulbright Bootcamp development process, Ariel pitched and designed a flipped classroom style virtual workshop, and also developed and lead a series of engaging in-person sessions on revision and collaboration during the summers of 2023 and 2024. This included learning a new virtual classroom tool, designing interactive video lessons, and taking the lead on developing Canvas resources for the course. In this role, she directed full time staff members in our program, who treated her as an equal and leader. This year, she has begun to take the lead as a presenter and facilitator for our info session and workshops: students love her sense of humor and delivery. I do not think of Ariel as a graduate assistant; she is 100% my trusted colleague.

Diversity & Inclusion

Through her academic work, Ariel seeks to acknowledge, interrogate, and challenge the ways in which the humanist imagination continues to center whiteness within black narratives; and to demonstrate that an ethical approach to reading black lifewriting must accommodate the full range of emotion, expression, and empathy inherent in black life as it is represented on the page. She brings these insights to bear on her role as an educator every day: demonstrating an ethical commitment to empathy and expression in her work with students and colleagues every day that acknowledges the wholeness of our identities, investments, and communities. From the care she took to ensure a transgender student's pronouns and gender identity were honored throughout every dimension of the application, review, and nomination process, to making time to mentor underrepresented students and younger colleagues, to speaking up in unit meetings to share her perspective on sensitive issues, Ariel seeks to build community and respect in every personal interaction and institutional process. Her work changes lives and the Emory community is all the better for it.

I could not be prouder to put Ariel forward as the Graduate Student Employee of the Year, with the support of the Pathways Center and the entire National Scholarships & Fellowships team. She embodies the qualities recognized through this award, and her mentorship will continue to impact the Emory community long after she graduates and moves into her academic career.

Sincerely,



Megan E. Friddle, PhD

Director, National Scholarships & Fellowships Program | Pathways Center
President, National Association of Fellowships Advisors