

**Recommendation Letter for Sasha Trukhnova**  
**2026 Emory Student Employee of the Year**  
**Categories: Community Service; Critical Thinking; Social Impact & Belonging**

It is my great pleasure to nominate Sasha Trukhnova for the 2026 Emory Student Employee of the Year Award in the categories of Community Service, Critical Thinking, and Social Impact & Belonging. In her role with the Barkley Forum for Debate, Deliberation, and Dialogue, Sasha consistently approaches her work with a level of care, intentionality, and passion that far exceeds the expectations of a student employee. Her contributions have had a meaningful and lasting impact on our office, the Emory community, and the broader audiences we serve. Across all of her work, a recurring and defining theme is Sasha's commitment to creating thoughtful, inclusive, and affirming spaces for dialogue. Whether she is designing campus engagement initiatives, facilitating complex conversations, or supporting large-scale programs, Sasha leads with empathy, intellectual rigor, and a deep respect for the experiences of others. These qualities make her an exceptional contributor to community service efforts and a model of socially impactful student leadership.

In the area of **Community Service**, Sasha has made distinctive contributions that extend beyond her formal job responsibilities and will continue to benefit our community well after her tenure. She has been instrumental in spearheading the planning for two major campus and community engagement initiatives that our office will launch in the upcoming academic year. The first is a *Martin Luther King Jr.-inspired World Café dialogue* designed for participants attending the annual Barkley Forum for High Schools Debate Tournament. This addition to the tournament seeks to build the moral climate of the high school debate community, and initiate a commitment to sustained dialogue by encouraging connection and understanding between competitors from different schools and backgrounds. This initiative reflects Sasha's ability to translate values of justice, reflection, and collective inquiry into accessible programming for young people, expanding the educational and civic impact of the tournament itself. The second initiative is an *Oxford-based community theory-and-practice conversation series*, grounded in the theoretical framework and ethnographic insights of her senior honors thesis in Anthropology and Cultural Studies. By intentionally bridging academic research with community dialogue, Sasha has expanded the scope of our office's engagement work in ways that are both innovative and sustainable, embodying the highest standards of community service outlined in the award criteria.

Sasha's work also exemplifies outstanding **Critical Thinking**. She approaches program design and facilitation with a rare ability to synthesize theory, experience, and practical constraints, making thoughtful decisions even in high-pressure or rapidly changing environments. A clear example of this occurred during a keynote facilitation training that Sasha was assisting in delivering, when unexpected technical challenges disrupted the planned format. Rather than allowing the moment to derail the session, Sasha quickly assessed the needs of the participants and pivoted to a more creative, discussion-based approach that preserved the learning goals while re-energizing the room. This ability to troubleshoot in real time—without losing sight of purpose or audience—is not as easy as it sounds, and speaks to her analytical agility and strong problem-solving skills. Finally, Sasha's impact in the area of **Social Impact & Belonging** is both profound and consistent. She demonstrates genuine empathy and compassion in every interaction, and she brings a sustained commitment to fostering belonging into the design, facilitation, and evaluation of dialogue spaces. Drawing on her background in podcasting and guided discussion, Sasha is especially skilled at helping participants feel heard, respected, and encouraged to engage across difference. Her facilitation style reflects a deep understanding of the importance of safety and humility in dialogue work. She actively seeks out diverse perspectives, remains open to new ideas, and models the reflective practice necessary for inclusive community building. In doing so, she not only promotes belonging within individual programs but also strengthens the culture of our office and the broader campus communities we engage.

In sum, Sasha Trukhnova is an extraordinary student employee whose work exemplifies excellence in community service, critical thinking, and social impact and belonging. Her leadership, adaptability, and unwavering commitment to inclusive dialogue have made a lasting difference in the Barkley Forum and beyond. I offer my strongest possible endorsement of her nomination for the 2026 Emory Student Employee of the Year Award.

Sincerely,

Barkley Forum for Debate, Deliberation, and Dialogue  
Emory University