

July 31st 2024

Dear Canadian Council of University Biology Chairs Award Committee,

I am thrilled to write a letter of nomination for Alannah Grant for the Science Promotion Prize. Not only is Alannah a dedicated PhD student and researcher, but we joke that she is doing her PhD “on the side” as she is so deeply immersed in, and committed to, science outreach and promotion activities. Some advisors might be annoyed that their PhD student was taking longer than the prescribed “program time” to complete their degree, however, the work in which Alannah engages is fundamentally important to making biology more accessible to equity designated groups of all ages, and also fundamentally important to her which matters immensely for me as an advisor; I have been happy to fund her extended time. Alannah is especially passionate about increasing accessibility of opportunities for experiential learning in biology. She regularly leads workshops and day camp modules for school-aged children, has been a board member of Bird Safe Guelph, is co-chair of our Departmental EDI committee, and is a Director for FREED (Field Research in Ecology and Evolution Diversified).

I first met Alannah in September 2017 while she was a student in my 3rd year experiential learning course “Lab and Fieldwork in Ecology”; in a class of almost 100 students, Alannah’s drive and enthusiasm was motivating and infectious, both to her small research group, and to the class as a whole. Alannah has repeatedly sought similar opportunities for immersive research experiences, excelling in challenging classes, and propelling her peers forward with her positivity and persistence. In 2018, after participating in a field course in Algonquin Park Alannah was part of an undergraduate research team that published a manuscript from their study, an impressive feat for an undergraduate student. Alannah began her field research on Grey Squirrels in Spring 2020 as part of the CitiSci project. In December 2021, deep in Covid pandemic chaos, Alannah made the commitment to transfer from the MSc to PhD program. A testament to her ability to communicate, Alannah placed first in the College of Biological Science heat of the 2020 3 minute thesis competition, and embarked on the impressive undertaking of coordinating a full field research season in the midst of a pandemic.

Alannah not only devotes herself fully to her studies, but has an uncanny ability to juggle several other demanding responsibilities. For example, while also working as a lab technician and curator of the insect collection at the Center for Biodiversity and Genomics, before she began her graduate studies, she volunteered with my CitiSci grey squirrel research team, spending long days in the field, and helping prepare samples in the laboratory. And, while working full time after graduating from her undergraduate, volunteered to co-host a day-long event for the Canadian Association for Girls in Science (CAGIS). CAGIS is a network of school age girls interested in STEM and as one of their hands-on events visited our lab and learned

about the urban wildlife conservation research we are conducting, using grey squirrels as a model system. Alannah seems tireless in her generous volunteerism and advocacy, she was also instrumental as a volunteer during the annual “Bug Day”, a community outreach event run by graduate and undergraduate students, and participates in outreach events at RARE Charitable Nature Reserve. Each July for the past 5 years, Alannah has led a small mammal module for a children’s daycamp, and is developing an extension of our CitiSci program for elementary schools. Last year, Alannah was elected as the student councilor for the Canadian Society of Zoologists. It is a measure of a student’s dedication, but also their character, and communication skills, in being willing to volunteer time to learn new skills, participate in research, and share that passion with youth and the community through citizen science initiatives and outreach events.

Equally impressive as Alannah’s field research and scientific progress is her dedication and action to advance Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Since September 2021, Alannah has co-chaired our Departmental Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee, advocating strongly for graduate student mental wellness and financial equity. In September 2022, Alannah tied as a winner of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Award from the Ontario Chapter of the Wildlife Society, and in Fall 2022 joined as a leader with FREED (Field Research in Ecology & Evolution Diversified), and in July 2024 was named a Director, where she has been independently fundraising to support a paid field research excursion for Indigenous, Black and/or Racialized undergraduate students (this year the group is spending two weeks in Algonquin Park!). Alannah also participates in the departmental Women in STEM discussion group, and as she is a woman of Jamaican heritage who has faced racism, she brings an important perspective and her strength and dedication to promoting DEI initiatives is phenomenal.

Clearly, Alannah has incredible character; every now and then we have the privilege of encountering students that inspire us to be better mentors, teachers, researchers and community citizens. Winning this prize would go a long way in highlighting the importance of her contributions to promoting, and making more inclusive, science to the wider community.

Thank you for considering Alannah’s application.

Sincerely,



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