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To the Bynum Mentor Selection Committee:

Growing up, I can recall many of my peers wanting to emulate Michael Jordan. After all, the infamous basketball player is considered one of the greatest athletes of our time. As a child, I vividly remember other children singing and chanting, "I want to be, I want to be like Mike"! Though I myself never sung these words, I must admit I have borrowed the tune. I was a sophomore in college when I met Dr. Ashburn – Nardo, and though I was nineteen years old and not a child, I found myself singing, "I want to be, I want to be like Leslie"! Allow me to elaborate.

Early on in my undergraduate career I decided I wanted to accomplish two goals: 1) to be a social psychologist and 2) to study stereotyping and prejudice. Fortunately, Dr. Ashburn – Nardo happened to have already accomplished both. For me, I had found my Michael Jordan. Though I was well aware of the goals I wanted to achieve, I was unsure of the path that led to a career in social psychology. I naively concluded that the best means to accomplish my goals was to imitate someone who had already achieved them. Though this approach may not be the worst means to achieve one's aspirations, it is certainly not the best, and fortunately, Dr. Ashburn – Nardo had better suited ideas to help me accomplish my goals. From the moment I made my aspirations known to Dr. Ashburn – Nardo, the dynamic of our relationship changed; she became the mentor, and I the mentee.

Throughout my undergraduate career, Dr. Ashburn – Nardo never hesitated to help me make the decisions that would achieve my goals. Her wise words always encouraged me to make

decisions that aligned with my goals, and that best allowed my undergraduate education to work in my favor. Consequently, with the guidance of Dr. Ashburn – Nardo, I began to shape my undergraduate education to bolster my chances of gaining acceptance into graduate school. Suggesting that I get involved in research, recommending challenging curriculum and developing my skills as an academic writer were just a few ways in which Dr. Ashburn – Nardo helped me prepare for my future success. Dr. Ashburn – Nardo also introduced me to opportunities that would help me excel in graduate school. For instance, with Dr. Ashburn – Nardo's encouragement I participated in IUPUI's McNair Scholars program. The nationally recognized program is geared towards increasing the quantity and quality of first- generation and underrepresented students that attend graduate school, and seek careers in higher education. Furthermore, Dr. Ashburn – Nardo also encouraged me complete an honor's thesis, an experience I greatly appreciate as I now embark on writing my master's thesis.

As I prepared for my future after graduating from IUPUI, Dr. Ashburn – Nardo's guidance continued. When I began considering which schools to apply for graduate school, it was Dr. Ashburn –Nardo who assisted me in tailoring my list. She considered not only the strength of the program, my research interests and the faculty member that would be my future advisor, but if she thought I would be happy in such a program. Dr. Ashburn – Nardo had come to know me quite well over the years, and consequently my success in graduate school was just as important to her, as my happiness. In short, her input was invaluable. In fact, Dr. Ashburn – Nardo's input led me to apply to Ohio State University. Despite my strong academic record, the program is among the top-ranked and I did not feel I qualified for such a program. Dr. Ashburn - Nardo encouraged me to apply anyway; and as a second-year graduate student in Ohio State's doctoral program in social psychology, I am quite glad I did. Quite frankly, I can say without a

scintilla of hesitation that I do not know for certain I would be where I am today if it were not for Leslie. Not because I lack the ability or the motivation to excel, but because without proper guidance even the brightest of students can falter. No journey can be successful without the proper road map. Leslie's role in my undergraduate education ensured that I found my own road map.

When I graduated from IUPUI, receiving my Bachelor of Arts in psychology, my mother threw me a surprise celebration; Leslie was among the attendees. As a gift to celebrate my accomplishments, she presented me with a beautiful, handmade necklace. Much time has passed since that day, and now as graduate student in social psychology there becomes many occasions where I am afraid – afraid that I simply do not have what it takes to succeed. The experience of graduate school is an experience like no other, and each day brings new challenges my way. For me, being afraid is all too common. On days where I am most afraid – when I have to present my research to my peers, or give a talk at a national conference – I wear the necklace Leslie gave me at my graduation party. The piece serves as a constant reminder that I do indeed possess the necessary skills to excel. And on the days where even the necklace cannot calm my fears, Dr. Ashburn – Nardo is always an e-mail or a phone call away. Just as she helped me excel as an undergraduate, she continues to advise and encourage me as a graduate student. Her role as my mentor did not expire upon my graduation from IUPUI and our relationship reminds me that I will always be a jaguar – her jaguar – at heart.

As a future academic, I aspire to one day serve as a mentor to my students. I long for the day I can help someone achieve their goals, take joy in their successes, and watch their goals materialize before my very eyes. This is the role Dr. Ashburn – Nardo has played in my life and she has inspired me to do the same. I hope to be an influence in a student's life the way she has

influenced my own. Like Dr. Ashburn – Nardo, I want to be a mentor, an inspiration, a teacher and a friend. You see, even now, years later “I want to be, I want to be like Leslie”.