



Christopher E. Bird  
Department of Life Sciences - College of Science and Engineering  
6300 Ocean Dr. Unit 5802  
Corpus Christi, Texas 78412-5800  
P: 361-825-6024 - F 825-2742

September 29, 2023

Dear Dr. Garth Clayton & Student Research Competition Committee,

I am writing to wholeheartedly recommend Mr. Joseph Garza for the Student Research Competition. I have had the pleasure of knowing Mr. Garza as a dedicated student volunteer for the Genomics Core Laboratory and I have agreed to be his mentor for the McNair Scholars Program as of this semester. Joseph's research interests are particularly notable; they ambitiously aim at optimizing coral aquaculture operations and integrating genomics-based techniques for coral resilience.

Joseph possesses a passion for the sciences and his academic record is exemplary, as evidenced by his 3.9 GPA in Biology and minors in Applied Mathematics and Chemistry. Joseph's involvement in multiple organizations such as the National Society of Leadership & Success, McNair Scholars Program, and Math Club speaks volumes about his commitment to academic and extracurricular excellence. It is clear to me that Joseph is dedicated to growing both as a researcher and as a leader. But what sets Joseph apart is his desire to apply his theoretical learning into tangible change, particularly in the field of marine biology.

Joseph has already amassed considerable research experience. Joseph was a stand-out volunteer in the Genomics Core Lab, being rated in the top 2 (tied) of 20 volunteers. The Lab Coordinator, Mr. Pedro Gonzalez, reports that Mr. Garza was the most punctual, reliable, devoted, detail oriented, and trustworthy volunteer. We also agree that Joseph is an excellent multi-tasker and time manager. Joseph is very skilled in pipetting and gel electrophoresis and is already familiar with the laboratory which will enable him to hit the ground running on this project where the majority of lab work involves these skills.

Joseph also worked in Dr. Geist's Early Life History Lab has given him experience in marine larval specimen identification, while his time volunteering in Genomics Core Lab has armed him with essential lab techniques. Further, his experience as an Aquarist at Salty Aquatics & Fish involved hands-on work with marine life and statistical analysis, highlighting his multidisciplinary skill set.

Joseph has also been an Undergraduate Chemistry TA where he had to distill complex subjects into comprehensible parts for newcomers to the field, a skill that is crucial for effective research presentation. His capacity for leadership is also evident from his founding and presiding over the Islander Summit Project, where he educates others on rock climbing and organizes outdoor expeditions.

Significantly, Joseph's forthcoming research will benefit from a collaborative partnership with Dr. Keisha Bahr, our coral reef professor. Dr. Bahr will be providing the coral specimens and adding her expertise to the project. The specimens we are working on were collected by Dr.



Christopher E. Bird  
Department of Life Sciences - College of Science and Engineering  
6300 Ocean Dr. Unit 5802  
Corpus Christi, Texas 78412-5800  
P: 361-825-6024 - F 825-2742

Bahr's Ph.D. advisor and eminent Pacific Coral Reef Biologist, Dr. Paul Jokiel. He considered these specimens to be noteworthy and represent the diversity of coral morphologies he observed in his immense experience. Connecting these skeletal morphologies with genetic identity will be very useful gaining a better understanding of coral reef diversity.

In summary, Mr. Joseph Garza is an extraordinary young man and a boon to any academic or research setting. His rich blend of skills, commitment, and practical experience make him an ideal candidate for the Student Research Competition. I recommend him without reservation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chr. Bird", written over a light blue grid background.

Christopher E. Bird, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor  
Director, Genomics Core Laboratory  
Faculty Advisor, TAMU-CC SACNAS Chapter