**Why did you choose your intended graduate course of study and how do you hope to make a difference in your field? 300 words**

I gazed up into the tropical forest canopy and realized that an organism uniquely adapted to its location occupied almost every millimeter. I had never felt so small before. I was in Tawau Hills Park, a forest reserve in Sabah, Malaysia that contains the tallest tropical tree in the world. Up to this point, my upbringing in rural Virginia and my curiosity about the workings of the natural world had focused me on the ecological processes that had generated the astounding diversity around me. I was completely fascinated by the basic ecology of pristine tropical forests. But my first trip to town several days later shattered the illusion of inviolability and forced me to reevaluate my academic trajectory. As our taxi left the gates, I suddenly realized that oil palm was planted right up to the boundary of the park. I stared down rows of oil palm plantations, my incredulity dulled by the monotony of the landscape. What was happening to tropical forests, and why did humans destroy such powerful, beneficial ecosystems? I could not understand natural systems, let alone develop strategies for protecting them, by studying ecology alone. I needed to complement ecology with economics, political science, and more to understand the dynamics of the Anthropocene. On that day, I resolved to become a leader in conservation science, either as a university faculty member or as a lead scientist at an international NGO, creating knowledge that will safeguard biodiversity and empower rural and indigenous people.

**Community organizer Grace Lee Boggs famously said, "We are the leaders we've been waiting for." Point Foundation agrees! Share an example of how you have contributed to positive change for marginalized communities, such as LGBTQ communities. Be specific about your personal participation and leadership in the project. How do you hope to build on this contribution in the future? OR, if you have not had opportunities to participate in this type of activity, discuss the specific contributions of another leader (like Boggs) that inspires you to advocate for positive change. How does their impact motivate you to be involved, and what do you want your future impact to be? 300 words**

I collaborate with and empowering aspiring scientists of underrepresented identities. I believe that solving global challenges requires a diverse set of perspectives, and yet academia is inaccessible and unwelcoming for many. During my Fulbright in Indonesia, I mentored three Indonesian post-baccalaureate students who worked as my field assistants, and they will be included in publications resulting from this work. One of my mentees was recently awarded a Chevening Scholarship and will attend graduate school in the UK. More recently, gender-nonconforming undergraduate students have shared that my presence as a non-binary person in academia has helped them feel welcome. I am gratified to provide the representation that I lacked as a young person. Finally, For the past two summers, I have helped undergraduates access funding so that they could be paid to work with me on my field research. They would not have been able to participate in my research without being compensated fairly for their labor. I have mentored four undergraduates and two graduate students as my field assistants so far. I have written recommendation letters for their graduate school and field biologist applications. One recently graduated student is conducting field research in Guatemala, where her maternal family originates, and enjoying bridging her cultural heritage and ecological research. Going forward, I hope to employ holistic application procedures to ensure that the mentorship opportunities that I create through grant-writing and research efforts continue to empower scientists of historically marginalized identities. In addition, I will continue to collaborate with early-career scientists while offering them publication authorship opportunities whenever possible.

**Black lesbian feminist writer and activist Audre Lorde wrote, "We are powerful because we have survived, and that is what it is all about -- survival and growth." How have your identities and experiences contributed to your growth and power? 300 words**

I am grateful for the opportunities I have received to grow beyond my origins. I am non-binary and grew up in a rural area without representation. After relocating to California for graduate school, I have finally recognized and begun to express my gender identity. I could have spent my life in an identity that felt suffocating, in a place that did not accept my full humanity, simply because I faced financial barriers. I would not have been able to attend university without the full scholarship I received from Cornell University. I felt my socioeconomic class keenly there. But after university, I won a Fulbright to conduct an independent research project in Indonesia. I learned to speak Indonesian and spent hours in conservation with our local guides, and in the process, learned how privileged I was, despite the challenges my upbringing posed.

My experiences with financial insecurity and gender identity, coupled with my experiences abroad, have forged my determination to use my privilege for positive change. I pursue this ambition in three main ways. Firstly, I seek to produce actionable science. I have co-developed research abroad with NGOs in service of their community-driven research programs, and my current research program is focused on conservation science applicable to farms across the US. Secondly, I mentor and collaborate with folks that have been historically excluded from academia, both abroad and in the US. Finally, I am involved as a leader in efforts to build a more just and inclusive community at UC Davis.