



# 2017-2018 Luce Scholars



Varun Aery



Melaku Arega



Sakaria Auelua-Toomey



Daniel Block



Christina Cilentio



Monique Claiborne



Jillian Correia



Joshua Feinzig



Benjamin Fleischacker



Cyrus Ghaznavi



Martha Isaacs



Cassidy McDonald



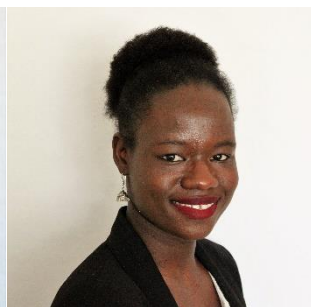
Neil Noronha



Corey Ruder



Elena Swartz



Kadiata Sy



Bryan Vadheim



Sophia Wallach



## 2017-2018 LUCE SCHOLARS

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Nominating Institution</i>	<i>Field of Professional Interest</i>
Varun K. Aery	27	University of Michigan	International Human Rights Law
Melaku A. Arega	21	Johns Hopkins University	Medicine
Sakaria L. Auelua-Toomey	25	University of Hawai'i at Mānoa	Psychology and Cognitive Sciences
Daniel J. Block	22	Swarthmore College	Political Science; Journalism
Christina A. Cilento	21	Northwestern University	Environmental Policy and Law
Monique K. Claiborne	22	Princeton University	Arts and Entertainment
Jillian L. Correia	23	Wake Forest University	Economic Development Policy
Joshua M. Feinzig	23	Yale University	Law and Government
Benjamin M. Fleischacker	23	Yale University	History; Musicology; Anthropology
Cyrus M. Ghaznavi	21	Rice University	Medicine; Global Health
Martha B. Isaacs	21	University of North Carolina	Transportation Planning
Cassidy S. McDonald	21	University of Notre Dame	Journalism
Neil J. Noronha	24	Georgetown University	International Affairs
Corey K. Ruder	22	George Washington University	Aquatic Biogeochemistry
Elena M. Swartz	28	University of Washington	Humanitarian Aid and Emergency Management
Kadiata M. Sy	27	Emory University	Law and Social Justice
Bryan E. Vadheim	26	College of William and Mary	Natural Resource Management
Sophia E. Wallach	24	Vassar College	Alternative Dispute Resolution



## 2017-2018 LUCE SCHOLARS

### Bios

#### **Varun K. Aery**

*Age:* 27  
*Degrees:* L.L.M., University of Michigan Law School, (expected) 2017; J.D., University of California, Davis, 2016; B.A. in Political Science, University of California, Berkeley, 2011  
*Nominating Institution:* University of Michigan  
*Field of Professional Interest:* International Human Rights Law

Growing up in a rural farming town in Northern California sparked Varun Aery's interest in understanding how socioeconomic conditions affect access to important public resources. Varun started his college education at a local junior college, but the lack of courses in political science required him to venture to more urban locations to study his area of interest. Recognizing that attending these distant colleges was not feasible for all individuals in his community, Varun was already witnessing how limited resources in rural communities could impact career opportunities for local students. His supportive college professors motivated him to continue his studies at the University of California, Berkeley, where he received a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. While a student, Varun interned for Congresswoman Barbara Lee, whose commitment to addressing the needs of lower income populations and to eliminating HIV/AIDS inspired him to pursue a career in public service. During the UC Berkeley Washington Program, Varun interned for the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice to advocate for marginalized groups, including domestic abuse victims. After graduation, he became a paralegal with the U.S. Federal Trade Commission to help prosecute cases of financial scams targeting lower income populations. In 2013, Varun began studying human rights law at the University of California, Davis, where he drew on his public service experiences to produce research to influence policy makers. As a law student, he published five articles in peer-reviewed journals advocating greater protection for the fundamental rights to human dignity, work, housing, healthcare, freedom from caste and gender discrimination, clean air, and marriage equality. His scholarship on the right to clean air enabled him to collaborate with leading international law and policy experts at the Northern California International Legal Scholars Conference to develop the normative scope and content of related environmental rights. Varun also spent a summer interning with the U.S. Department of State. Recently, he worked as the Senior Research Assistant to the United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights. He has also served on committees for the American Bar Association and World Affairs Council. To deepen his understanding of international law and economic, social, and cultural human rights, Varun is currently pursuing a Master of Law (LL.M) at the University of Michigan. On a personal note, he is a classically trained kathak dancer.

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## Melaku A. Arega

Age: 21  
Degree: *B.S. in Molecular and Cellular Biology; Neuroscience, Johns Hopkins University, (expected) 2017*  
Nominating Institution: *Johns Hopkins University*  
Field of Professional Interest: *Medicine*

Born and raised in Ethiopia, Melaku moved to Portland, OR with his father and two younger sisters in 2009 at the age 14. He taught himself English at home by watching YouTube videos and studying his Oxford dictionary. He had his first dream in English 11 months into his new life in America. Four years later, he matriculated into Johns Hopkins University to study molecular & cellular biology and neuroscience on a Gates Millennium Scholarship. He spent his sophomore year at the University of Oxford, a choice inspired by his dictionary from high school. While at Oxford, he tutored English to a seven-year old kid who had recently immigrated to England. In Baltimore, he has volunteered for the Jail Tutorial Project since his freshman year, and now leads a group of ten GED math and reading tutors to serve detainees diagnosed with mental illnesses at the Baltimore Central Booking and Intake Center. On campus, he serves as a teaching assistant for more than 150 students for the Chemistry Laboratory as well as The Nervous System, a rigorous year-long course all Neuroscience majors take. As a co-president and vice president of Hopkins Ethiopian and Eritrean Society, Melaku organized two separate service trips to Bishoftu General Hospital, a facility in Bishoftu, Ethiopia serving millions of people within its 100-mile radius, and delivered medical supplies from the Johns Hopkins Hospital. He will start medical school in 2018, and aspires to working toward the global eradication of HIV. In his free time, he enjoys science writing, soccer, and reading books.

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## Sakaria L. Auelua-Toomey (Sai)

Age: 25  
Degree: *B.A. in Psychology and Communicology, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, 2016; A.A. in Liberal Arts, Honolulu Community College, 2013*  
Nominating Institution: *University of Hawai'i at Mānoa*  
Field of Professional Interest: *Psychology and Cognitive Sciences*

Sakaria "Sai" Auelua-Toomey is a recent graduate in Psychology and Communicology at the University of Hawai'i Mānoa. Born in Honolulu, Hawai'i of Samoan and Irish parents, Sai had an early exposure to the diversity of intercultural communication, which stimulated his subsequent research interests in how different cultures maintain effective communication with one another and how socio-cultural factors affect perception. As an undergraduate research assistant in the Intergroup Social Perceptions Lab, he explored the malleability of identity through its influence by culture, motivation, and situational cues, and how that identity affects intergroup cognition and communication. Sai also worked in the Minority Health International Research Training Program, with a biomedical research team at the Thai Red Cross Anonymous Clinic in Bangkok, Thailand, where he focused on the impact of stigmatization on HIV infection rates in transgender women. Sai also studied individuals with



Autism Spectrum Disorder and schizophrenia, as a research assistant at the Hawai'i Early Assessment Lab. For his senior honors thesis, Sai collaborated with Interactive Autism Network at the Kennedy Krieger Institute to investigate individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder, which led to his first publication in the *Mānoa Horizons* undergraduate journal. This was followed by an internship in the Center for Study of Language and Information at Stanford University. Sai plans to pursue a Ph.D. in perception, decision-making and communication, and leverage his research to facilitate effective intercultural communication in international relations. As a Samoan, he promotes greater representation of Pacific Islanders in academia and politics and has plans to create programs that support this goal while serving as a role model for Pacific Islanders. Sai currently serves in the United States Air Force, providing him a unique experience with a better understanding of the military's perception of risk and how international challenges are handled. He also volunteers as the unit's physical training leader and unit education advisor. Concurrently, Sai serves as a seminar leader at the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, a U.S. Department of Defense institute that addresses regional and global security issues with participation of representatives from the United States and over forty Asia-Pacific nations. As a seminar leader, he facilitates an environment for discussion and collaboration based on inclusion, transparency and mutual respect. When not working, he enjoys being active by participating in races, rock-climbing, Brazilian jiu-jitsu, and basketball.

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## **Daniel J. Block**

*Age:* 22  
*Degree:* B.A. in Political Science; History, Swarthmore College, 2016  
*Nominating Institution:* Swarthmore College  
*Field of Professional Interest:* Political Science; Journalism

Daniel Block is a recent graduate of Swarthmore College, where he majored in political science and history. One of eight students to receive their degrees with highest honors, Daniel was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa, and was the recipient of the school's Ivy Award. A native of Armonk, New York, Daniel has a longstanding interest in politics and policy both inside and outside of the classroom. During his college summers, he interned in the Washington D.C. office of U.S. Senator Kristen Gillibrand and on the re-election campaign of his congressman, Sean Patrick Maloney. After graduating, he volunteered on Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign. In addition, he held various leadership positions in Swarthmore College Democrats and studied comparative politics during a semester abroad in Budapest. Daniel also has a passion for journalism. At Swarthmore, he was the Editor-in-Chief of the *Phoenix*, the college's print and online student newspaper, where he managed a staff of fifty students and won awards from the Society of Professional Journalists and Associated Collegiate Press. He worked as an editorial intern at *The American Prospect* and as a staff writer for *The Philadelphia Inquirer* during the summers of 2015 and 2016, respectively. While working for *The Prospect*, Daniel wrote for the website, conducted research, and managed the magazine's Twitter presence. As an intern at *The Inquirer*, he published over twenty articles on topics ranging from Donald Trump rallies to school taxes. At Swarthmore, Daniel worked as a research assistant to several professors, studying American political

development, the ethics of war, and how globalization has shaped modern insurgencies. He also conducted independent research into the history of U.S. state constitutions, resulting in an essay that received Swarthmore's 2015 Judith Polgar Ruchkin Prize, given to the best paper on politics or public policy. Daniel later presented his findings at the Northeastern Political Science Association's 2015 conference. Daniel aspires to merge his interest in academia and journalism as a public intellectual, attuned to both scholarly research and the broader world. He plans on pursuing a Ph.D. in comparative politics and writing about his findings as a freelance journalist. Currently, he is working as a ski instructor in Park City, Utah, helping children learn how to enjoy his favorite hobby.

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### **Christina A. Cilento**

*Age:* 21  
*Degree:* B.S. in Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University, (expected) 2017  
*Nominating Institution:* Northwestern University  
*Field of Professional Interest:* Environmental Policy and Law

Christina Cilento is a senior at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL, where she studies environmental policy and sustainability. Originally from Allentown, PA, she is particularly interested in climate change and energy systems and how these intersect with global social injustices. On campus, Christina has served as a core organizer of Northwestern's fossil fuel divestment campaign and president of the Associated Student Government, through which she has gained experience lobbying her administration and crafting policies that benefit the student body. In addition, she serves as the Student Advisory Board representative for the Program in Environmental Policy and Culture and was a founder and editor of Northwestern's first environmental publication, In Our Nature. In 2015, Christina was selected as one of ten students from the U.S. to travel to the UN's COP21 climate change conference in Paris, where she met with delegates from countries at the front lines of climate disasters, thus propelling her interest in global environmental justice and challenging her to critique Western approaches to tackling the climate problem. Christina's campus involvements and her exposure at COP21 have inspired her to pursue a career in environmental advocacy, using law and policy to bring about social change. In her spare time, Christina enjoys perfecting her cooking, crocheting and knitting skills, all of which are, admittedly, limited.

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### **Monique K. Claiborne**

*Age:* 22  
*Degree:* B.A. in Philosophy, Princeton University, (expected) 2017  
*Nominating Institution:* Princeton University  
*Field of Professional Interest:* Arts and Entertainment

In May 2017, Monique Claiborne will graduate from Princeton University with a B.A. in Philosophy and a Certificate in American Studies. Growing up in the small southern town

Opelousas, Louisiana, Monique developed a deep appreciation for local culture and the arts, despite limited extracurricular opportunities in her hometown. During her sophomore year at Princeton, she discovered her love for philosophy. Her independent research during her junior fall semester proposes a framework by which one can attribute moral responsibility to agents, and she spent her junior spring semester independently researching the ethical consequences of aestheticizing evil in popular films. Her senior thesis offers an account of the aesthetic experience that occurs when using interactive digital products, and it examines the ethical consequences of designing and interacting with empathetic technology. As a member of the Campus Iconography Committee, Monique collaborates with the executive vice president of the University and select professors, students and administrators to draft proposals aimed at diversifying Princeton's iconography to better reflect the university community. Her primary creative outlets during her time at Princeton have been dancing and choreographing for Disiac Dance Company, as well as photography and filmmaking for Princeton Faith and Action. She also enjoys leading campus tours, coaching a youth basketball team and helping undergraduates and graduate students with written work as a Fellow in the Princeton Writing Center. Monique plans to continue studying the intersection of ethics, aesthetics and culture by pursuing a PhD in Philosophy. She also hopes eventually to open her own coffee shop, a space whose design will reflect its neighborhood and whose mission will serve diverse patrons.

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### **Jillian L. Correia**

*Age:* 23  
*Degree:* B.S. in Mathematical Economics, Wake Forest University, (expected) 2017  
*Nominating Institution:* Wake Forest University  
*Field of Professional Interest:* Economic Development Policy

In May 2017, Jillian Correia will graduate from Wake Forest University as a Reynolds and a Presidential Scholar with a B.S. in Mathematical Economics and a minor in Studio Art. Jillian developed a passion for addressing the serious health implications of food insecurity while volunteering for a Native American permaculture institute on the Kha'Po Owingeh Pueblo in New Mexico. There, Jillian facilitated The Pueblo Food Experience, a diet-improvement initiative where tribal members eat foods solely indigenous to their region and culture, equipping Pueblo peoples with the resources and inspiration to regain their health and traditional permaculture practices. As an independent researcher, Jillian's work examines political, socioeconomic, and institutional factors that influence food intake and human wellbeing. She first set out to uncover the complexities of the multinational food system in UK primary schools, where her extensive field work and ethnographic research revealed the intricacies of children's eating practices. She has since presented her research at the 9th Annual International Conference on Sociology in Athens, Greece, and the findings, published in a peer-reviewed journal, serve as inspiration for schools and policy makers looking to improve lunch practices through grassroots change. Jillian's subsequent research looks comparatively at food systems in the UK and Switzerland, and most recently, her work analyzes Multinational Time Use Survey Data to quantify time spent eating as a determinant of Body Mass Index (BMI). At Wake Forest University, Jillian guest lectures for Freshman Year

Seminars and other courses on cognitive development, ethnographic research methods, international food culture and policy, and independent research processes and proposals. Currently she is President's Aide for the Office of the President, serving as liaison between the President and the student body. She is also Associate Editor and referee for *Food Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, where she promotes food systems as a serious field of inquiry by offering theoretical and editorial guidance. Jillian plans to pursue a career where she may continue leading efforts to address the serious political and economic challenges facing global food security. In her free time, she enjoys vegetable gardening, cooking, and creating sculptures and Raku pottery.

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### Joshua M. Feinzig (Josh)

Age: 23  
Degree: M. Phil. in Criminology, University of Cambridge, (expected) 2017; B.A. in Ethics, Politics and Economics, Yale University, 2016  
Nominating Institution: Yale University  
Field of Professional Interest: Law and Government

Originally from South Florida, Josh Feinzig studied Ethics, Politics & Economics at Yale University, where he graduated *summa cum laude* and Phi Beta Kappa, and won the University's Roosevelt L. Thompson Prize for his commitment to public service. He is now a Gates Cambridge Scholar at the University of Cambridge, where he is studying for an MPhil in Criminology. Josh became increasingly aware of the need for criminal justice reform upon arriving in New Haven. After working with the police department and city government on various criminal justice initiatives, Josh cofounded Project Youth Court, an organization that takes trained high-school volunteers into federal courtrooms to serve as the lawyers and jurors in juvenile misdemeanor-offense trials. During one summer, Josh conducted criminal justice policy research at the White House Council of Economic Advisors. He has also done research for the Connecticut Governor's Youth and Urban Violence Commission, and served as an appointed city commissioner on the New Haven Peace Commission, assisting in the application of restorative justice paradigms to policing oversight and youth crime. As a Yale Law School Arthur Liman Public Interest Fellow, Feinzig worked as an investigator for the New Orleans Public Defenders as well as for a public interest law firm in St. Louis, where he independently researched the municipal court and jail systems. The results of his study on discriminatory and "debtors' prison" practices were written up in the *Newsweek* and have played a role in ongoing class-action lawsuits. Through these experiences, Josh learned of residents' deep-seated sense of estrangement from the criminal justice and political process, confirming that policy responses must foster inclusiveness in the criminal justice system to renew trust in government at large. Josh looks to attend law school, and ultimately guide the long-term reformation of the world's criminal justice and prison systems through legal scholarship and a direct influence in policymaking. He is an avid hiker and rock climber, and enjoys playing bluegrass music as a bass player and mandolinist.

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## **Benjamin M. Fleischacker (Benji)**

Age: 23  
Degree: *B.A. in History, Yale University, (expected) 2017*  
Nominating Institution: *Yale University*  
Field of Professional Interest: *History; Musicology; Anthropology*

For reasons he can't remember, Benji Fleischacker requested a cello from his parents at the early age of six. Since then, he has devoted himself to studying the instrument in orchestras, chamber music and solo performance. Before college, Benji spent a year teaching cello at a local music school in Costa Rica, where he developed both a love of teaching and a recognition of the many musical traditions that children bring to the music classroom. Benji will graduate from Yale in 2017 with a Bachelor's degree in History, concentrating in Latin American history. Aside from his academic interest in the discipline of history, he hopes to use the context of Latin American social history to develop a music curriculum that better takes into account the backgrounds and cultures of music students. In college, Benji was the principal cellist of the Yale Symphony Orchestra, an avid chamber musician, and the business manager and a member of the all-cello rock band Low Strung, for which he arranged original covers of popular music. He pursues his interest in expanding the scope of classical music by performing in contemporary ensembles and premiering student compositions. In March 2017, he will be premiering a suite of seven pieces based on the Bach cello suites which he commissioned from composers at Yale. Benji has performed original research in Costa Rica on the national music education program for which he taught in 2012. Interviews with government officials, program directors, professional musicians, students enrolled in the program and their families demonstrated the discursive limits of classical music education. Benji hopes to bring a global perspective to the challenge classical music poses to local traditions, and the opportunities communities have to expand their culture through music education and performance.

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## **Cyrus M. Ghaznavi**

Age: 21  
Degree: *B.A. in Biological Sciences; Policy Studies, Rice University, (expected) 2017*  
Nominating Institution: *Rice University*  
Field of Professional Interest: *Medicine; Global Health*

Raised in a Dallas home by an Indian mother and an Iranian father, Cyrus Ghaznavi was imbued with the spirit of multiculturalism, which has been pivotal in granting him a global outlook later in his education, especially with respect to international health. Cyrus will graduate from Rice University in May 2017 with a B.A. in Biological Sciences and Policy Studies. While an undergraduate, he researched rotavirus infection of human intestinal cells to understand how reactive oxygen species incur robust interferon responses. His affinity for virology has earned him the nickname, "Cyrus the Virus," which was especially appropriate for a class he taught at Rice entitled, "WWIII: Intro to Biowarfare." In the same vein, he presented on the ethical dilemmas associated with dual-use biological research at Rice's

inaugural TEDx salon. Drawing on his experience as a researcher and global health enthusiast, Cyrus founded the Rice University chapter of END7, an international campaign devoted to raising awareness of neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) and funds for their elimination in disadvantaged nations across the globe. Since its founding, he has traveled to Washington, D.C. annually to lobby for increased funding for the USAID NTD budget by speaking to congressional representatives. Recognizing the importance of policy in the advancement of science, he interned in D.C. at the Federation of American Scientists, where he researched legal trends in biotechnological patent law after a string of paradigm-shifting Supreme Court cases. Back in Houston, Cyrus has demonstrated a commitment to scholastic life at his university by tutoring his peers in STEM courses and general academic matters as part of the Academic Fellows and Peer Academic Advisors programs, respectively. Cyrus hopes to attend medical school, focus on infectious diseases, and build a career at the World Health Organization. In his free time, Cyrus enjoys trying new restaurants, listening to audiobooks, writing poetry, and studying Japanese.

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### **Martha B. Isaacs**

*Age:* 21  
*Degree:* B.A. in Geography of Human Activity, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, (expected) 2017  
*Nominating Institution:* University of North Carolina  
*Field of Professional Interest:* Transportation Planning

Martha Isaacs will graduate with honors in May 2017 with a B.A. in the Geography of Human Activity and minors in Philosophy and City and Regional Planning from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC). On a full merit scholarship, she has spent her undergraduate studies analyzing the ways in which transportation accessibility affects urban citizens' mobility, from the unequal distribution of light rail routes in her hometown, Baltimore, to the lack of walkability observed in her current neighborhood in Chapel Hill. Particularly interested in participatory planning to increase social capital in neighborhoods, especially through accessible transportation, she has worked for the New York City Anti-Violence Project and The Glass-House Community Design in London. In the Fall of 2015, she spent a semester abroad comparing city planning practices in New York, Buenos Aires, Dakar, and Hanoi. She received research funding to study resilience in Durban, South Africa, and co-authored an article for the UNC urban planning blog, *Angles*, about the Rockefeller Foundation's 100 Resilient Cities initiative as implemented in Durban. Experienced in data analysis from her time as a consultant at Nelson\Nygaard, a transportation planning firm in San Francisco, she hopes to apply her knowledge of public policy and transit coverage to increase transportation options for disabled, elderly, and low-income communities. Back at UNC, she volunteers as a family mentor for the Refugee Community Partnership and visits incarcerated youth with Criminal Justice Awareness and Action. She also works as a Research Assistant at the Highway Safety Research Center in Chapel Hill, developing issue briefs on bicycle and pedestrian traffic impact analyses. Martha is currently writing an honors thesis focusing on barriers to cycling in the Burmese refugee community in Chapel Hill, and will present her work at a session regarding 'Immigrant Experience' at the Association of American Geographers conference in April 2017. She is also teaching a seminar course on how the built environment affects

place-based identity and concepts of home, incorporating her interests in photography, filmmaking, and music into experiential learning methods in urban planning. Building on this topic, she participated in the UNC TEDx student speaker competition, and was chosen to speak in the UNC TEDx conference about the privatization of residential neighborhoods in the U.S. Martha enjoys running mid- to long distance races and hosting a weekly radio show for UNC's student-led radio station.

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## Cassidy S. McDonald

Age: 21  
Degree: B.B.A. in Marketing, University of Notre Dame,  
(expected) 2017  
Nominating Institution: University of Notre Dame  
Field of Professional Interest: Journalism

Cassidy McDonald will graduate in May 2017 from the University of Notre Dame with a business degree in marketing and a minor in Journalism, Ethics, and Democracy. Ultimately, she plans to work as a reporter, telling the stories of marginalized voices as they interact with powerful policies and systems. In fall 2016, she traveled alongside columnist Nicholas Kristof to report on American poverty for the *New York Times*; she wrote about alternatives to incarceration, drug problems in Native American communities, and a billionaire who is quietly donating his fortune to Oklahoma's social programs. At a summer internship with CBS News in New York City, she worked in the shooter-producer unit and spent many of her days "in the field," booking interviews, shooting video, and solving last-minute problems. At an earlier internship with the 60 Minutes in Washington D.C., she researched a variety of topics including Russian military capabilities, gun death statistics, and Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman. She was its first intern to travel out of town for two shoots, coordinating interviews at FBI Headquarters and in Chicago, and independently producing a shoot in West Virginia. She began her career in Madison, Wisconsin as an intern at the local NBC affiliate, WMTV NBC15, and at Wisconsin's second-largest newspaper, the *Wisconsin State Journal*. At the *State Journal*, she reported on gang violence, higher education, and city government, and wrote seven page-A1 articles in her first month on the job. At Notre Dame, she is editor-in-chief of the student newsmagazine, *Scholastic*, and manages a team of 24 (in addition to about 30 regular contributors) to produce a monthly glossy magazine. Recent issues have focused on the school's sexual assault disciplinary procedures, campus-wide reactions to Donald Trump's victory, and homelessness near campus. She also worked for Notre Dame's sports broadcasting division, Fighting Irish Media, where she co-hosted an online, sports-highlight show and produced live softball broadcasts. She anchors during Notre Dame's 24-hour webcast, "Notre Dame Day," and is emcee of the school's "Advisory Council" dinners, hosting dinner events for about 250 of the school's top decision-makers. She first discovered her passion for journalism at age 17, when she got a job making videos at her local police department. This semester, she'll raise money to fund a Liberian primary school class by (slowly) training for her first marathon. (She's trying to convince her donors to contribute per minute, rather than per mile.)

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## Neil J. Noronha

Age: 24  
Degree: *M.A. in Security Studies, 2016; B.S. in Foreign Service, 2014, Edmund Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University*  
Nominating Institution: *Georgetown University*  
Field of Professional Interest: *International Affairs*

A District, Maryland, Virginia (“DMV”) lifer, Neil Noronha, a rising national security professional, grew up in Bowie, Maryland, completed ten years of education in Washington, D.C. (Gonzaga College High School and Georgetown University), and has worked in Arlington, Virginia. Neil recently left Federal government service, having worked since August 2014 in the Obama Administration. From December 2015 to January 2017, Neil was the Special Assistant to the Senior Director for Response Policy on the National Security Council (NSC) staff at the White House. He oversaw the presidential approval process for declaring severe domestic incidents as major disasters or emergencies under the Robert T. Stafford Act. Additionally, he served as a duty officer within the Response Policy Directorate, working with the White House Situation Room to inform senior NSC staff and White House principals, including the President, about severe domestic incidents, their impact on local populations, and the U.S. government response. Before joining the NSC staff, Neil was at the Department of Defense as one of its youngest political appointees hired under the Obama Administration. Under the Defense Fellows Program, Neil served as the Special Assistant to Michael Lumpkin, the former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict, where he was Mr. Lumpkin’s principal speechwriter and handled special projects related to counterterrorism, humanitarian affairs, and counternarcotics. Additionally, Neil was an Action Officer within the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence, where he covered issues related to defense cover and human intelligence activities. Obtaining his Bachelors of Science in Foreign Service and recently his Masters of Arts in Security Studies, both from the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, Neil interned at various Federal agencies and departments, a think tank, and a financial services company. He is passionate about solving transnational threats, such as terrorism, organized crime, climate change, and natural disasters, through economic policy and instruments. Neil is an avid basketball and football fan, consistently rooting for the Baltimore Ravens and Georgetown Hoyas.

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## Corey K. Ruder

Age: 22  
Degree: *Ph.D. in Environment and Natural Resource Sciences, Washington State University Vancouver, (expected) 2020; B.A. in Environmental Studies, St. Olaf College, 2016*  
Nominating Institution: *George Washington University*  
Field of Professional Interest: *Aquatic Biogeochemistry*

Corey Ruder is a field ecologist working on the forefront of climate change research. She is currently finishing her first year as a Ph.D. student at Washington State University Vancouver,

where she is studying how internal waves affect the production of greenhouse gases in reservoirs. She is a recent Phi Beta Kappa graduate of St. Olaf College in Minnesota, where she received a Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Studies. As an undergraduate, Corey was selected as a Beckman Scholar and spent a year and a half developing a reliable indicator of agricultural runoff in lakes. She continued her research for an additional year in a follow-up project linking runoff to increased production of a lesser-known, but extremely powerful greenhouse gas called nitrous oxide. In addition to her extensive research on lakes, Corey conducted a series of ecological research projects in Australia, traveled to Japan to analyze the spread of radioactive material across a farm near Fukushima, and studied permafrost thaw as a research assistant in Siberia. She has presented the results of her research at three conferences, including a poster at the American Geophysical Union 2016 Fall Meeting. Her hobbies include SCUBA diving and recreational boxing and she is the founder of the Ole Thrift Shop LLC, a student-run business aimed at decreasing campus waste and promoting conscious consumerism. As a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow, Corey works to further our understanding of the drivers of climate change while increasing communication to the public and advocating for greater representation of women and minorities in STEM-related fields.

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## **Elena M. Swartz**

**Age:** 28  
**Degree:** *M.P.A. in International Development, Evans School of Public Policy and Governance, University of Washington, (expected) 2017; B.A. in Growth and Structure of Cities, Bryn Mawr College, 2012*  
**Nominating Institution:** *University of Washington*  
**Field of Professional Interest:** *Humanitarian Aid and Emergency Management*

From Biloxi, Mississippi to Cape Town, South Africa, Elena Swartz has experienced the power of organizations working together to help communities in crisis. Elena is driven to help people find creative local solutions to complex problems due to humanitarian conflict and natural disaster. Originally from Newton, Massachusetts, Elena has worked around the United States and the world. After finishing her Master of Public Administration degree at the University of Washington's Evans School of Public Policy and Governance, she plans to work for a public sector agency building partnerships within post-crisis communities. She is particularly interested in the role that arts and culture play in protecting human dignity during crisis. As a two-term AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps Member, Elena helped communities recover from Hurricane Katrina and Superstorm Sandy, in addition to community economic development projects. This experience inspired her to work with communities in crisis and to study emergency management and resilience strategies. She received a BA with honors in Growth and Structure of Cities from Bryn Mawr College in 2012. As an undergraduate she was named a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow and received funding to conduct a two-year independent research project on the socioeconomic role of heritage sites in South Africa. Elena's lifelong interest in heritage and the arts led her to study at the Headlong Performance Institute in 2013 where she created original contemporary performance art. Elena then helped build the administrative and financial capacities of small arts companies and programs in Philadelphia by improving their professional networks and organizational



systems. Her work in government, non-profits, and private sector entities increased her interest in management strategies. She entered the Evans School to focus on monitoring and evaluation and management of international humanitarian work. In the summer of 2016 she interned with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland where she helped introduce system improvements to the Human Rights Council and researched human rights field operations. As a Luce Scholar, Elena hopes to gain field-level perspectives on Asian countries' experiences and apply her leadership skills and creative talents.

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### **Kadiata M. Sy (Kadi)**

**Age:** 27  
**Degree:** *M.A. in Islamic Law, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, (expected) 2017; M.Litt., University of St. Andrews, Scotland, 2016; B.A. in Political Science and Middle Eastern Studies, Emory University, 2015; A.A. in Philosophy and Political Science, Perimeter College, Georgia State University, 2012*  
**Nominating Institution:** *Emory University*  
**Field of Professional Interest:** *Law and Social Justice*

Kadiata Sy arrived in Atlanta, GA as a refugee from Mauritania at the age of twelve. Resettling in a new environment without any knowledge of English and enrolling in a school for the first time of her young life, Kadiata learned first-hand the empowering potential of education. Her experiences have motivated her to be a leader in her community and to continue to pursue higher education. Beginning at community college, Kadiata was elected the Student Government President of her campus and active with several humanitarian organizations in the greater Atlanta area, including interning for the International Rescue Committee and mentoring refugee youth with the Refugee Family Services. Her passion for social change and leadership experiences working with non-profit organizations led to her induction into the Omicron Delta Kappa National Leadership Society. Kadiata was also awarded the national Jack Kent Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship, which sponsored her studies at Emory University. While at Emory, she founded the Middle Eastern Studies Association and worked with Emory Peer Tutoring as an Arabic tutor and mentor to provide campus-wide programming on Middle East-related issues. She graduated with a B.A. in Political Science and Middle Eastern Studies in 2015 as one of four Emory seniors to be selected as a Robert T. Jones Scholar. This enabled her to complete a Master of Letters in Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asian Security Studies at the University of St Andrews, Scotland in the fall of 2016. She is currently seeking an MA in Islamic Law at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, where she has been elected as the Student Representative for the 2016-2017 Masters of Law program to serve as a liaison between the administration and student body. While at SOAS, Kadiata is specializing in the harmonization of Islamic Law and the Human Rights discourse. Her Master's dissertation focuses on the appointment of female judges in Shari'a courts in Muslim-majority countries and aims to further her research on women's agency within the Islamic legal framework. She aspires to work in the field of human rights in Islamic law as both an activist and an academic, focusing on gender issues while pursuing doctoral studies.

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## **Bryan E. Vadheim**

*Age:* 26  
*Degree:* *M.Sc. in Climate Change Science and Policy, University of Bristol, 2015; M.Sc. in Economics, London School of Economics, 2014; B.S. in Chemical Engineering and in Economics, Montana State University, 2013*  
*Nominating Institution:* *College of William and Mary*  
*Field of Professional Interest:* *Natural Resource Management*

Bryan Vadheim is an economist interested in natural resource management at the intersection of science and policy. A Montana native, Bryan has long been passionate about natural resources, and graduated with honors and degrees in both Chemical Engineering and Economics from Montana State University. During his undergraduate career he conducted a variety of research on natural resource topics, resulting in academic publications on low cost water sanitation using concentrated ultraviolet light and conflict mineral policy in the Democratic Republic of Congo, as well as a patent in disinfection technology. Alongside his research activities, he also helped coordinate water and sanitation projects in rural Kenya with Engineers Without Borders, including on-the-ground implementation and stakeholder engagement. A 2013 Marshall Scholarship recipient, Bryan earned graduate degrees in Economics (with merit) from the London School of Economics and in Climate Change Science and Policy (with distinction) from the University of Bristol. As a researcher at the Grantham Research Institute in London during his studies, Bryan worked on spatially disaggregated econometric models of forestry in Indonesia and infrastructure in Ethiopia. Since 2015, Bryan has worked as an economist on natural resource policy issues at Vivid Economics, a small consultancy in London. He has particular experience in forestry and water management policy, but has also applied his engineering background to work on the integration of renewable energy sources into electricity grids. He is a co-author of the World Bank's *State and Trends in Carbon Pricing 2016* report, and has led the development of land use projects in Ivory Coast and Peru that utilise satellite imagery to inform agricultural and forestry policy. He works extensively with developing country governments and NGOs, with on-the-ground experience in Ethiopia and Ivory Coast. Outside of work, Bryan is an avid traveller, Ultimate Frisbee player, outdoorsman, and unapologetic burrito snob.

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## **Sophia E. Wallach**

*Age:* 24  
*Degree:* *B.A. in International Studies, Vassar College, 2015*  
*Nominating Institution:* *Vassar College*  
*Field of Professional Interest:* *Alternative Dispute Resolution*

A native of Poughkeepsie, New York, Sophia Wallach graduated from Vassar College in May 2015, with a degree in International Studies (Political Science and Economics) and a minor in French. During college, she interned at the Family District Court and Public Defender's Office, where she witnessed the continuous backlog of cases and zero-sum approach to resolving conflict. Frustrated, Sophia looked for alternative forms of dispute resolution, eventually turning to the nationally recognized Dutchess Mediation Center. Sophia is the youngest

accredited third-party mediator at the Center and practices in New York State. After graduation, Sophia moved to Washington, DC, to intern at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, Africa Program, focusing on the policy aspects of peacebuilding, conflict management, and U.S.-Africa trade relations. She then joined the Federal Trade Commission as an Honors Paralegal in the Bureau of Competition. Early on, Sophia distinguished herself as lead paralegal on a major international consent merger and a successful hospital litigation. Based on her accomplishments, she was selected from her program to serve as the Bureau Director's paralegal. This gave her insight into the larger strategic negotiations and international aspects of nearly every case. That year, Sophia also received funding to attend the 2016 International Transformative Mediation Conference. These experiences deepened her appreciation for the law and strengthened her conviction that mediation should be used to improve it. She plans to pursue a law degree, starting in the fall 2018. In her spare time, Sophia spends her copious amount of energy playing violin in a community orchestra, running half-marathons, and indulging her taste for French cheese.

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