A STUDENT GUIDE TO OBTAINING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Most graduate programs require three to five letters of recommendation. These letters directly and specifically should support your application for admission to professional or graduate school. They should focus upon those areas that directly pertain to your potential to succeed in a graduate program or within a profession. Professional schools typically require letters from faculty only, or faculty and professionals. Academic graduate programs typically require letters from faculty and researchers only. Be sure to check each school's or program's requirements to see who the letters should be from, and how many letters you will need to submit. In all cases, however, the letters should be from people who know you well and can write about your academic and/or professional strengths and accomplishments with detail and specificity.

WHOM TO ASK FOR LETTERS

- Professors/Faculty Advisors
- Current or previous employers
- University administrators/staff

ESTABLISHING FACULTY CONTACT

Establish contact with your instructors early in your college career. A conscientious, deliberate attempt to know and be known by faculty members in your major field of study will bring about greater opportunities for obtaining substantive and specific letters of support for graduate or professional school admission. Letters of recommendation from faculty are more meaningful when based upon their personal knowledge of your abilities and performance as generated through a mutual interest or shared academic or learning activity. Some admissions committees also welcome letters from faculty in areas outside your major. There are a number of strategies for pursuing faculty contact, such as:

- **Course Selection** - Consider selecting courses with small class sizes to maximize personal contact with professors and enrolling in subsequent courses offered by the same professor. If qualified, apply for departmental honors or research programs (if available in your major) to establish closer relationships with faculty. Opt for essay exams or extra work whenever possible to draw attention to your writing, research and initiative. And, of course, maintain strong academic performance.

- **Independent Studies** - Independent study is typically initiated by upper division students and is based on a topic of interest to both student and professor. A professor may require topical readings and a laboratory or written project so that the experience qualifies for departmental credit. Such an experience will introduce students to research in fields of interest and provide the opportunity for substantial faculty contact.

- **Directed Group Studies** - Faculty contact also will result when students enroll in group studies courses in which several students are directed by a faculty member in a special project, usually of the professor's choosing, in laboratories, libraries or field sites.

- **Academic Internships/Volunteer Activities** - Students are responsible for finding internships or volunteer experiences related to their major or career goals. These experiences may or may not be well-supervised and guided by faculty. Try to choose those which include faculty participation so that you can maximize your chances for faculty contact and discussion.
• **Teaching and Research Assistantships** — Consider offering to become a teaching or research assistant for professors. Generally students have performed well in courses that they want to "TA." The possibility of becoming a research assistant normally depends upon faculty need for library or laboratory work by assistants, and/or upon available space in laboratories and adequate funding.

**ESTABLISHING CONTACT WITH PROFESSIONALS**

Some professional school programs require or suggest letters of recommendation from professionals in that same field who can attest to the applicant's suitability, preparation and motivation for the profession, and who can comment on qualities which relate to the applicant's potential to succeed in professional school. These include: master's programs in business, social work, counseling, public policy and administration, physical therapy, public health, and international affairs; doctoral programs in law, dentistry, pharmacy, optometry, osteopathic, podiatric and veterinary medicine; and teaching credential programs. The Career Center lists paid jobs and internships both on and off campus on Handshake.

**CONTENT OF GOOD LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION**

Be certain that your writers are aware of all of your accomplishments so they can discuss the work you did with them in the context of your whole record. Students can help in the construction of their letters by providing certain information to the people who will be writing the letters. Background information such as transcripts, autobiographies, resumes, personal statements and research papers can help faculty members or professionals write thorough and substantive letters. Provide such documentation for your writers whenever possible.
REQUESTING A LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION (PROTOCOL)

1. Determine the best person to write the letter. Notify the writer at least one month in advance of the letter’s being due. Take into account the educator’s schedule/time of year when requesting a letter. No one writing a letter of recommendation wants to feel rushed, and any student applying to graduate school does not want a rushed letter of recommendation on file.

2. Request letters of recommendation in person whenever possible. Allow enough time at that meeting to discuss your request, your background and any questions the letter writer might have.

3. Choose someone who will write a strong recommendation. If you are uncertain, ask the individual what type of reference will be provided. If the person doesn’t feel comfortable writing your reference, he or she may suggest that you find someone else to write it. It is in your best interest to do this.

4. Be gracious in your request. Do not expect a letter as your right.

5. Supply the writer with specific information about the program to which you are applying.

6. Include reference forms (if required by a particular graduate program) along with stamped and addressed envelopes. Give the writer the specific date the recommendations are due. Make sure to fill out and sign any relevant sections of this form. Provide the full name, title, and complete mailing address of the person to whom a letter is to be written.

7. Set up a contact system between the educator and yourself using email or telephone number, so that if any point on the personal achievement text needs to be clarified, the writer can contact you.

8. Provide your educator’s telephone number on your final application in case the academic reviewer has any questions. Know how many copies are required and exactly where the finished letter should be sent.

9. Don’t use references from relatives or people who that don’t know you well.

10. Waive your right to review the letters whenever possible. A sealed letter will merit more consideration during a review process.

11. If you are asked to write a rough draft of the letter of recommendation, graciously accept.

12. Always thank your recommender in writing. It is courteous to keep your references informed of your application process.

13. Keep your letters organized and in a safe place. Good letters of recommendation take time to write and writers do not appreciate being asked numerous times to re-create letters that have been lost.