

February 1, 2009

To: Recommendation Letter Writers

From: Maureen Forrestal, Asst. Provost for Scholarship

Subj: Submitting Letters

When asked to write a letter for a student who is applying for a scholarship which requires an institutional nomination, please send one copy of the letter as an e-mail attachment to mforrest@gettysburg.edu

Copies of this version are for distribution to the members of the Faculty Fellowship Advisor Selection Panel.

For some scholarships, I may also need for you to submit a hardcopy on college letterhead to me via campus mail at
Box 410
Office of the Provost

If this version is needed, it should be placed in a sealed envelope with your signature across the flap.

If you have any questions about the procedures, please feel free to contact me for clarification.

Thank You

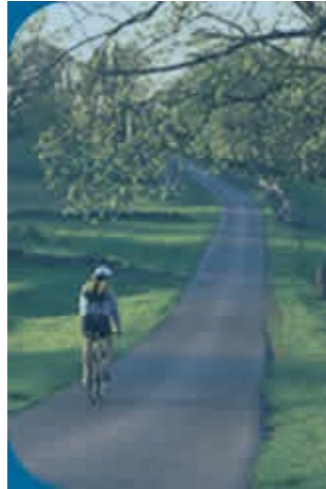
Office of the Provost

Penn Hall, 3rd floor

Phone: 717-337-6835

Email: mforrest@gettysburg.edu

Gettysburg College



Writing Letters of Recommendation for Nationally Competitive Scholarships

Dear Faculty:

If you have picked up this brochure, it is because one of our students has asked if you would be willing to write a letter of recommendation on his/her behalf for a particular scholarship or fellowship.

First of all, let me personally thank you for your willingness to become part of this important process. For most of our students, applying for a nationally competitive scholarship or fellowship is a very worthwhile educational process, regardless of the outcome. Assisting these students with completing any of the many facets of the application can also prove to be a professionally affirming experience for us as well.

In recent years, the level of competition has risen to such a degree that every aspect of a candidate's application is closely examined by the scholarship or fellowship foundations. A slightly less than informative and stellar recommendation letter, therefore, may actually mean the difference between a student receiving the award or not.

As a result, I have attempted to gather advice from some of the most successful college and university scholarship/fellowship advisors across the country with regard to composing substantive recommendations. It is my hope that some of their suggestions may be helpful to you as you start to compose letters for our students.

If you have any questions with regard to the scholarship recommendation process and/or suggestions to improve this brochure, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Again, thank you for your efforts.

Sincerely,

Maureen Forrestal
Assistant Provost for Scholarship

Brief descriptions of *some* of the nationally competitive scholarships in the order of their deadlines...

Marshall www.marshallscholarship.org
Graduate degree at any U.K. institution of higher education

Rhodes www.rhodesscholar.org
Graduate degree at Oxford University

Mitchell www.us-irelandalliance.org
One-year of graduate study at any institution of higher education in Ireland or Northern Ireland

Fulbright www.iie.org/fulbright
One academic year of graduate study, teaching, and/or independent research in one of over 130 foreign countries

National Science Foundation www.orau.org/nsf/nsffel.htm
Graduate degree at any accredited U.S. university in a science or science-related field

Carnegie www.ceip.org
One-year paid position working as a Junior Research Fellow for the Endowment for International Peace in Washington, D.C.

Goldwater www.act.org/goldwater
Undergraduate funding for students intending to become professionals in mathematics, the sciences, or related fields.

Truman www.truman.gov
Undergraduate funding for students intending to become professionals in a field related to public service.

Pickering www.woodrow.org
Undergraduate and graduate awards for students committed to serving as Foreign Service Officers with the U.S. Department of State.

Udall www.udall.gov
Undergraduate funding for students interested in environmental and/or Native American tribal health policy.

Jack Kent Cooke www.jkcf.org/graduate
Graduate funding for students in any field who demonstrate an interest in the arts or humanities.

Words of Advice regarding letter writing

Corrine Welsh, Villanova University

“How can you write a letter of recommendation that best reveals the student’s characteristics that the scholarship committee values?”

Ask yourself what you like about this student. Why does s/he stand out, why do you admire him/her, what makes him/her delightful? Think about how you realized that these characteristics existed, and consider describing that process.

Be detailed. Give concrete examples of your claims about the student’s brilliance so the selection committee can understand him/her in specific terms. Potential sources for such details include:

- Excerpts from student’s papers
- Explanations of student’s research and how s/he went about it
- Formal and informal conversations you’ve had with the student
- Notable contributions to classroom discussion or classroom dynamics
- Student’s interactions with you, other faculty, or peers
- Observations on his/her growth
- How the student has enriched you”

Dr. Susan Whitbourne, U. Mass at Amherst

1. “Length counts. Brevity is not a strength in letters of recommendation. We have found that successful applicants have long and detailed letters, averaging about two single-spaced pages.
2. Be as specific as possible. Listing a set of adjectives that attest to how bright, motivated, and diligent the student is will not be as effective as telling a story based on a classroom experience or an informal interaction you had with the student. Think of a memorable incident with the student that clearly points to the student’s strengths.
3. Address the student’s potential as well as past achievements. Committees evaluate not only what the student has done but also what s/he has the ability to do in the future.
4. Direct the letter to the concerns of the program. Please be sure you are familiar with the criteria that will be used by the selection committee.
5. Keep in mind what the student is saying in his/her essay. If you can reinforce points made by the student, this will be viewed positively by the committee.”

Writing Letters of Recommendation for Fellowships and Scholarships —Adapted from Baylor University website

Please keep in mind when starting to write the letter that most of the prestigious scholarship committees want to know not only about your relationship with the student but, in addition, in what ways the student has contributed to this relationship.

Although you don’t want to spend too many words writing about your own areas of expertise or the program/department’s, it is important that you provide a context within which the reader may assess your areas of expertise and Gettysburg’s. Remember to describe some of the aspects of excellence of your program as you discuss the candidate’s achievement within it.

The selection committee is looking for the applicant’s level of scholarship and preparation for advanced work since part of its task is to decide if this student could smoothly adjust to the academic work required by the host university and/or research project in question. Include examples and anecdotes about the intellectual and research skills that the student possesses.

The applicant’s character and industriousness is also an important factor. What are the distinguishing marks of this student’s maturity and motivation? Has the student acted independently in any important situation you have known i.e. is s/he disciplined?

Community Service has become a critical element for success with all the major scholarships. What do you know about the candidate’s demonstrated interest in and respect for fellow beings? Is s/he altruistic? When have you seen the student do something that shows his/her propensity for public service? What are his/her commitments to community members, peers, etc? Is s/he a responsible person?

Evidence of Leadership is also essential. What do you think is the likelihood that this young person will make a significant contribution in some important arena in the future? What distinctions does this student bring to the competition that lifts him/her above the rest? In what ways have you seen him/her be a leader e.g., initiating (not just participating in) a program?

Explain how the student has grown intellectually (and otherwise) over the years you’ve known him or her?

It is important that you say why the opportunity to study in a particular country is so valuable for this particular student—especially if it’s in the United Kingdom because spots are ultra-competitive. What will s/he gain from the chance to study in a given country that is distinct?