

LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION GUIDELINES

In collaboration with the members of the Northridge Scholarship Program Selection Committee we have developed the following guidelines to help faculty members write the best possible letter of support for students they want to recommend for scholarships, and to suggest some strategies for politely declining to write a letter.

Choosing not to write a Letter of Recommendation:

There are times when it is in the student's best interest for you to decline writing a recommendation letter. If you cannot write a strong letter, it may be best not to write one. Weak letters hurt, rather than help, the student. The short list below can help you identify reasons for making the decision and explaining to the student why you are declining to write a letter on their behalf.

- How well do you know the student? It is very difficult to write a strong letter if you do not know the student, or you have had limited contact.
 - Are you prohibited from interacting with students outside of the classroom due to licensure guidelines? This may limit your knowledge of the student, but you can still write a strong letter regarding academic performance, classroom leadership, attention to detail and deadlines, etc.
 - Some students will not have an opportunity to volunteer in your lab or assist with research. Are there other ways for students to get to know you and vice versa?
 - If it has been several years since you had the student in class you may no longer be familiar with their strengths, contributions, and goals. This can be overcome through personal meetings or correspondence.
- If your experiences with the student are not needed for the letter's purpose, it might be better for the student to find a more appropriate reference.
- If you don't have any positive experiences to express. You may not have any relevant experiences upon which to base a recommendation, or you may have negative experiences that prevent you from recommending the student.

Writing a Letter of Recommendation:

Although you know the student well and can strongly recommend the student, the following are some techniques that have been employed by faculty colleagues to gather and organize information, to save time in writing letters, and to document the work you have done:

- Ask the student to send you an email stating the reason for the letter of recommendation, the "target" audience that will reach such a letter, and background regarding the award or program to which the student is applying.

- Prepare a set of specific questions and ask the student to respond via email in order to help you recall rich specifics about them (other than final grade) to put in your letter.
- Keep a letter template on your computer and break it down in parts to use as standard items, and then individualize for each student. Make sure that the total effect of the letter appears individualized and that any personalized data has been changed from a prior student.
- Find a partner to engage in reciprocal letter proofreading or ask your department clerical assistant help.
- Ask the student to let you know the results of their application.
- Encourage your college's departments to discuss in their freshman classes the importance of creating a close relationship with faculty for future letters of recommendation. Emphasize the importance of these letters and the kinds of applications which require them.
- Keep a file of letters you have written to refer back to when students request another letter to be sent in support of a different application.

Feedback:

If you have any best practices you would like to share with your colleagues, please email Scholarship Coordinator, Veronica Corona at veronica.corona@csun.edu. We will update the materials with your suggestions and materials.

Thank you for supporting our scholars.