

Guidelines: Letters of Recommendation

Writing good letters of recommendation for students takes time and energy. I consider these letters an important service that the faculty provides students, and I take them seriously.

Therefore, please be aware that:

- a. I am happy to write a letter for students, particularly those that did well in my courses (e.g., A- or better) or worked successfully with me on research projects.
- b. I will be honest in my letters. If you were conscientious, attended class regularly, read/engaged the material, participated in discussions, and wrote/communicated well, my letter will reflect this. Alternatively, if you rarely attended, wrote poorly, did not read the material, and sat silently through discussions, my letter will reflect this instead.
- c. The strength of my letter depends on how well I know you, how you performed in the classroom (which is the main way that I interact with students), and how much detail you provide in the materials that I request below.
- d. If I do not feel that I can provide you a *good* letter of recommendation, I will tell you in advance. This is not to be “mean,” but rather to help you reach your goal(s). Your task is to get the best letter possible to strengthen your application and make you competitive. If I cannot help you accomplish that task, I will tell you. *You* should also be sure that I am the best person to write a letter for you – as opposed to the first (or nicest) faculty member you know, the instructor of your favorite course, etc.
- e. You will need to provide me with the materials requested below *three weeks* before the (first) letter’s due date. This is because I need time to read your materials, collect my thoughts, and write/tailor the letter. Please do not ask me to invest time in writing a letter for you before you invest time in writing your personal statement and collecting the requested materials. Similarly, please do not ask me to write letters on short notice (e.g., a week). My schedule may not permit me time to complete a letter, and even if I can, it may not be as good as you will need. More time is always better.

Some advice/suggestions as you prepare your application(s):

- a. Review the application(s) early so that you can contact letter writers early. Many students fail to do this and discover too late that they need letters.
- b. Spend time on your personal statement (or short answer/essay questions). This will tell others *why* you believe they should select you (and if you have no idea why you are a good applicant, then you might reconsider applying in the first place). Many resources exist to help with writing clear, concise statements; I am happy to offer suggested resources. I can also review your statement and provide you with feedback – if you get me the statement draft one month before the deadline.
- c. I highly recommend that you *waive your right* to view the letter if asked. If you do not do this, those receiving the letter may not trust its accuracy. As I state above, I will tell you if I cannot write a *good* letter of recommendation for you. If you do not trust me on this, I am probably not the best person to speak on your behalf.
- d. If you have questions, please feel free to contact the Career Center (www.career.uga.edu) or me. I prefer to speak with students in person (if possible), since a conversation will allow us to address all questions clearly and quickly.

Having considered the above statements, if you still wish to receive a letter of recommendation from me, please provide me *all* of the following materials at least *three weeks* prior to the letter's "due date:"

1. A personal statement that explains your goals and reason(s) for applying to the programs you selected (scholarships, internships, graduate schools or otherwise). This should be part of your application. (You should provide me with any short answers or essay questions that you submit as part of the application. Note: Even if your program does not require a personal statement, I will need to know why you are applying; in other words, I need a statement from you under all circumstances.)
2. A current copy of your résumé or curriculum vitae. This lets me know more about what you do outside the classroom.
3. An unofficial copy of your transcript, with the courses you took with me highlighted. This helps me recall how you did in my courses, and lets me place your performance within the context of your entire academic record.
4. Information about the programs to which you are applying (if they are not standard political science graduate programs or law schools). Please do not just send me web links unless they are exact; I do not have the time to research the various programs to which students apply. I trust that you have done this and can provide me with basic information.
5. A list of all programs to which the letter must be sent, along with the due dates for each program and the instructions for submission. Please arrange the list chronologically, indicating the precise degree programs to which you are applying (if applicable; e.g., Political Science PhD, rather than PhD). If the letter must be mailed, I need the mailing address. Alternatively, if the letter must be submitted by email, I need the recipient address.
6. Any forms that need to be submitted with my letter. Be sure to: a) clarify which form goes with which application (if it is not completely clear), and b) complete these forms (neatly) according to the instructions below.
7. For all applications, please complete any basic information about me, such as my name, position, and contact information. The information you will need includes:

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Finally, for those that receive letters from me, please feel free to keep me posted on what happens. I write these letters because I believe in helping students reach their goals, and I enjoy hearing about their successes.