

## **Guidelines to Obtaining Letters of Recommendation or Support**

### **Katayoun Chamany, September 24, 2014**

#### **Letters of Recommendation or Support**

At many points in your life, you may seek individuals to provide letters of recommendation or support. When requesting these letters of support/recommendation, one should follow an established protocol and etiquette to ensure that your letters are personalized, appropriate, and on time.

#### **Timing**

It is best to ask individuals for a letter at least one month in advance, and be mindful of holidays, breaks, and sabbaticals. A winter or summer break provides more lead time. Since you might be applying for more than one opportunity, the person writing the letter will appreciate supporting materials well in advance to assist in the timely completion of all letters.

#### **Items to Support Your Application**

Since you may reach back in time to ask a former professor to support you, may have limited contact with the letter writer, or may have not previously expressed interest in a particular area, it is best to provide supporting documents to ensure the letter is fit to the particular opportunity. Items to include:

1. **Curriculum Vitae.** This is different from a resume, in that it has an emphasis not on paid employment, but rather course work, educational experiences, internships and volunteer work, scholarships, community and student organizations, affiliations with professional organizations, and independent project work ([owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/641/01/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/641/01/)). If you have a **biographical sketch**, share that as well. It may be beneficial to have a biography regardless, since it can also serve as your two-minute personal summary at interviews, etc.
2. **Transcript, or List of Courses and Grades.** This can be an unofficial or informal transcript provided to the recommender.
3. **The Personal Statement.** Most opportunities that you are considering will ask for a personal statement. **YOU SHOULD ALWAYS HAVE SOMEONE READ THIS, SUCH AS YOUR FACULTY OR ACADEMIC ADVISOR, OR CAREER SERVICES.** A draft is fine to send, but expect comments for revision.
4. **One Paragraph of Highlights.** If there are personal experiences or other items pertaining to your work in a particular course, project, etc., remind the recommender of these highlights and any other characteristics you hope the will be addressed in your recommendation letter.
5. **Signed and Completed Forms.** If the application includes printed forms or waivers, please be sure that these are completed by you and then provided to the recommender if they need to be attached to the letter.
6. **Deadlines and Formats.** A consolidated chart of ALL opportunities to which you are applying, including a summary description of the program, important deadlines, relevant URLs for information, required letter formats and submission procedures (online, email, hard copy), and addresses for mailing where needed, ensures that nothing will be lost in piecemeal email exchanges.
7. **Self-Addressed Envelopes.** If the recommender needs to send forms and letters separately as hard copy, write the address on envelopes and include them in the materials provided.

#### **Thank You and Follow-Up**

Each person who writes a letter of support will appreciate a thank you note and a follow-up. What transpired, where you are you now? Did you ultimately receive the position/ fellowship/ etc. How is it going? How has it changed your perspective?