

## GUIDELINES FOR REQUESTING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Nearly all applications for grants, fellowships, study abroad, and graduate school require letters of recommendation from individuals who are in some position to assess your qualities as a candidate. These references may provide independent corroboration and support for the claims you advance in your application, lend an expert stamp of approval to a proposed project, or describe your academic and extracurricular achievements and suitability for a proposed course of work or study. When soliciting letters of recommendation, keep the following in mind:

- Consider the nature of the program to which you are applying in selecting whom to approach for a letter of recommendation and in what capacity and how well each person knows you. When applying for thesis research funding, for example, a letter from a scholar in your proposed field will carry more weight than one with no knowledge of that area of research.
- Select as recommenders people who know you well, who have followed your work closely in class and have read and commented on at least one paper. A professor or graduate student with whom you've taken several classes (or a small seminar) and attended office hours will be better able to write you a strong letter than one who knows you only as a face in a crowded lecture hall. Applications often require multiple letters (two or three is typical). In that case strike a balance and seek recommenders who will be able to address the different skills and activities you wish to highlight in your application. Include at least one professor among your recommenders if possible.
- Feel free to consult a trusted adviser about whom to ask for letters of recommendation.
- Give your recommenders plenty of time. If possible request a letter up to a month, and no less than two weeks, before it is due. If you receive no reply after 4-5 business days, write again. If you still receive no reply, turn to someone else. Once someone has agreed to write send them supporting materials (described in the next point) and follow up with them (politely) one to two days before the deadline unless you know that they have already submitted the letter. Don't forget to thank your recommenders and know that they will be very pleased to hear of the outcomes of your applications (especially good ones, which include interviews even if you don't make the final cut).
- Provide your recommenders with all the information they need to write a good letter. This includes your own resumé and a draft of your application statement, if applicable; a description of the program or grant for which you are applying; and all logistical information about how they should submit the letter, including the deadline and the URL, email, or postal address that should be used to turn it in. You might also consider sending them copies of any papers you wrote for their classes, along with the grades and comments received on those papers.