

## **Requesting recommendation letters:**

A thoughtful recommendation letter from the right person can add tremendous depth and credibility to your application. More than just the icing on the cake, a good reference can be a deciding factor.

Remember that your actions and your attitude in the context of all interactions with faculty contribute to your reputation as a scholar. Make the effort to be engaged in the academic community, inside and outside of class, and stay in contact with instructors and staff. By building relationships now, you will develop life-long advocates for your success.

### **Choosing wisely**

#### **Who knows you well enough to write a compelling recommendation?**

Think about faculty members who know you well as a scholar or as a member of the academic community. Ideally, those who have inspired you, challenged you, or helped you grow as a student.

#### **Who can write the most compelling recommendation letter with respect to this particular program or position?**

Depending on the position or program, you may want to draw attention to different aspects of your academic background. Always think about who can speak most articulately to relevant skills or experiences for the position/program. For example, if you are applying to a graduate program in chemistry, a letter from a chemistry professor would be appropriate.

### **Asking wisely**

#### **Is he/she comfortable writing a recommendation for you?**

You may have identified the perfect candidate to write your recommendation, but you need to make sure he/she is on the same page. Start your inquiry by explaining why you are requesting a letter from him/her:

*Dear Professor Einstein,*

*Your course on relativity changed the way I look at the universe. While working on my final project on photoelectrons, I grew increasingly interested in understanding the relationship between particles and waves. It was this turning point that led me to want to pursue graduate work in quantum mechanics...*

Once you have provided context for your request, ask: *Do you feel you know me well enough to write a recommendation letter for me?*

Rather than: *Will you write a recommendation letter for me?*

Not only does the wording of the former offer the recommender a graceful way of declining, it also demonstrates that you understand that the purpose of a recommendation is to add depth to your application, not just to fulfill a requirement.

### **What does he/she need in order to write a recommendation for you?**

#### Plenty of time, and a polite reminder

- Ideally, you should make the request three or four weeks ahead of the deadline, but *at a minimum*, two weeks
- Follow up at least one week before the deadline to ask if he/she needs any additional information

#### Information about the program or position

- Full name of the program - *not* an acronym – as well as a brief description
- Name and title of the person to whom the letter should be addressed, if available
- Website of the program or organization
- Deadline for submission
- Instructions for submission - mail, fax, e-mail, etcetera – along with a pre-stamped and pre-addressed envelope if you expect the person to mail a letter
- Reference form, if applicable

#### Information about you

- Statement about why you are interested in this particular program/position, qualified, how it specifically fits your short or long-term goals, and your qualifications
- An up-to-date resume that reflects the skills and experiences relevant to the position/program
- A copy of your transcript

#### Follow up

- Make sure to thank your recommenders, ideally through personalized notes. He/she is more likely to write on your behalf again if you are gracious.
- If your application is successful, let your recommender(s) know! They'll be happy to know their endorsements made a difference.

*Adapted from:* University of California, Irvine, Campus-Wide Honors Program, "Etiquette When Requesting a Letter of Recommendation Letter from a Member of the CHP staff or UC Irvine faculty"