

## **Letters of Recommendation: A Short Guide for Students & Faculty**

### **For FACULTY to Consider:**

#### **About Recommendation Requests**

- Consider including [a recommendation policy](#) in your syllabus, one that clarifies what students should consider before asking for recommendations and how they should do so. Being specific about your criteria in a syllabus could make this process more transparent for students and raise their awareness of what they can do to earn strong recommendations.
- Consider saying no, especially if you cannot write a strong letter due to time constraints, concerns about an appropriate fit, or a sense that someone else could contribute more. Be clear about why you are saying no, which will help the student to consider next steps.

#### **About Information Needed**

- Determine what you need to know about the student. Consider transcripts, resumes, career goals, drafts of the student's own application materials, course essays with your comments, etc. One format to consider: ask students to respond to questions you have crafted (for example, "Tell me about how you overcame a challenge in my course" or "Which of the following traits best applies to you, and how did you use it in my course?").
- Determine what information you need to know about this opportunity. Your letter needs to explain why a student is a good match for a particular opportunity. Ask students to provide information about the opportunity as well as brief statements about why they are applying.
- Prepare an established set of instructions to send out to students for whom you are writing recommendations. Include the instructions for students above, as well as a list of materials students should send and your preferred method/timeline for receiving them. Consider separate lists for distinct types of letters (study abroad, jobs, graduate school, awards, etc.) Consider requesting that students remind you of deadlines or notify you of outcomes.
- Require that the student submit a written "[Authorization to Release Educational Record Information](#)" form to the Registrar's office, if the letter's destination is beyond Lewis & Clark. Both you and the Registrar's office should receive a copy. Students can also, through WebAdvisor, grant you permission to see educational records for a defined period of time.

#### **About Writing the Letter**

- Be as specific and vivid as possible. Include numeric assessments ("she is one of the top three students I have taught") and accomplishments that exceed those of any good student.
- Avoid [biased language](#) that might unintentionally diminish the student or invoke stereotypes, such as words that stress effort or reliability rather than ability or accomplishment.
- Update carefully when using a letter you have written for a different purpose in the past.
- Use resources available to you, such as
  - Lewis & Clark letter [templates](#) and letterhead (both paper and [digital](#))
  - Style guides ([Penn State University](#) has an excellent one)
  - Colleagues who can lend insight (such as the [fellowships advisor](#) or [faculty representative](#) for an award, the [Career Center](#), the [Overseas & Off-Campus Programs](#) office, etc.)
- Keep in mind that recommendations help students to develop and realize their goals—and to continue the education they have undertaken at Lewis & Clark. *Thank you for writing them!*