

# Writing a Strong Recommendation for National/International Fellowships\*

Thank you for your interest in writing recommendations for Wabash men as they compete for national and international fellowships. While many potential recommenders are quite familiar with the processes associated with fellowship competitions, as well as with what makes letters for fellowships distinctive, others are not. This document and others in the faculty/recommenders section of the Office of Nationally-Competitive Fellowships and Scholarships website are intended to serve as resources and provide answers to common questions.

## What does a recommendation mean for fellowships?

A recommendation should serve as an endorsement of a student's fellowship application. Depending upon the criteria of the award, you may be expected to comment favorably on everything from the student's intellect or research capabilities to his adaptability or moral character.

Please consider declining the student's request for a recommendation if any of the following statements apply:

- You feel that you cannot be emphatically and genuinely positive in support of the student.
- You recall little more about the student than his recorded grades.
- You believe that you are not the best person to write a letter.
- The student approaches you in a highly unprofessional manner.
- You simply do not have the time or material to write a good letter for the student.

In any of these cases, you should feel free decline. You may then wish to provide the student with guidance on finding a more appropriate reference or simply

direct him to the Fellowship Advisor and we will talk through his list of potential recommenders.

## What can I expect of the student?

Students applying for fellowships are given advice about how and when to ask for a recommendation, as well as what to provide to their potential recommenders, which includes information about the fellowship and a link to the fellowship website. Do not hesitate to request additional details from the student if few have been provided. Please also note that you may certainly refuse to write a recommendation if the applicant does not waive the right to view the recommendation.

## What is expected of me?

It is vital to understand that many scholarship selection processes are based solely upon paper applications, with no opportunity for applicants to meet with representatives of the foundation in a personal interview. It is also likely that the vast majority of applicants will be well-qualified and quite impressive. Your recommendation will thus provide much of the context that selection committees use in comparing our student with other applicants.

Recommenders are typically asked to evaluate the candidate based on the selection criteria for the fellowship; these will be listed at the fellowship site for which the student should have given you the web address. Occasionally, fellowship websites also offer specific guidance for recommenders. Additionally, there is particular recommendation information for a number of specific, major fellowships in the [Guidelines for Recommenders for Specific Fellowships](#) section.

You should always also feel free to consult with the Fellowship Advisor if you would like additional information about a particular fellowship or what is expected in a recommendation. In addition to any fellowship-specific tips, here are some things to consider and/or include in any recommendation:

- frank, concrete details providing evidence of the qualities or capacities you discuss;
- the criteria on which you base your judgments;
- how the student meets your criteria; and
- (very) brief information about you and your work as context for your comments.

Although it is the student's responsibility to select a good variety of recommenders, **you might ask the student who else is writing and what the other writers are likely to discuss.** This will ensure that you avoid repetition and provide a comprehensive picture of the student.

If you are called upon to write letters for two or more applicants for the same fellowship, please try to make your letters as distinct as possible. Two letters that are too alike are unlikely to help either student. *If you are writing for two students in a competition that relies on districts or regions (such as Rhodes or Marshall), the Fellowship Advisor can tell you whether the students will actually be in direct competition with one another.*

Recommendations that are requested in letter form should typically be anywhere from 1.5 to 3 pages in length. If you find it difficult to go beyond a single page in a letter of recommendation but you really do want to provide one, please ask the Fellowship Advisor for suggestions and/or request further information from the student which could help you add more content.

**Please note** the special case which is the application for a **Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship**. This is the fellowship most often pursued by Wabash students, and in this case, your recommendation will not come in the form of a letter; rather, recommenders are directed to respond to a specific set of questions. It would thus be most fruitful for you to first consult the recommendation form in order to frame your responses. Please don't hesitate to contact the Fellowship Advisor should you have questions about the Fulbright ETA recommendation form.

## To whom should I submit my recommendation?

The student should provide instructions on how, when, and to whom your recommendation should be submitted. Since many recommendations will be submitted electronically, you will often receive an email with invitation to complete your recommendation and instructions.

**Because most electronic submission systems do not allow revision after a recommendation has been submitted, you may wish to provide a drafted version of your recommendation to the Fellowship Advisor for review.** All of us are human and, more often than we would like to believe, recommendations are submitted with incorrect names, significant misspellings, or inappropriate 'cut and pasted' material. An attentive reading by another set of eyes can help avoid errors that may harm our students' applications.

For some of the elite awards requiring institutional nomination or endorsement (such as Rhodes, Marshall, Mitchell and Truman), the Fellowship Advisor will request a drafted letter from you by a certain date - *in advance of the final deadline* - and the recommendations will be reviewed by the Fellowship Advisor and faculty on the Graduate Fellowship Committee. Our goal is to provide a group of letters that can best support the application and we may request greater emphasis or elaboration of certain points before the final letter is submitted.

Recommendations are one of the most important elements of students' applications, and we are deeply grateful to you for providing them. Please feel free to contact Fellowship Advisor Susan Albrecht at x6297 or [albrechs@wabash.edu](mailto:albrechs@wabash.edu) at any time for assistance or support.

\*Adapted with permission from Carleton College's Office of Student Fellowships