

Nationally Competitive Scholarships *and* *Letters of Recommendation*

The Office of Nationally Competitive Scholarships
www.wtamu.edu/ncs



Nationally Competitive Scholarships

For undergraduates

- **Goldwater Scholarship:** *For sophomores and juniors in mathematics, natural sciences and engineering.*
- **Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU):** *National Science Foundation sponsored summer internships for STEM fields.*
- **Truman Scholarship:** *For juniors interested in careers in public service fields.*
- **Udall Scholarship:** *For sophomores and juniors in environment-related fields or Native Americans in tribal healthcare and tribal policy.*



Nationally Competitive Scholarships

For graduating seniors and graduates

- **Fulbright Scholarship:** *For one year of overseas study, research or English language teaching*
- **Jack Kent Cooke Scholarship:** *For graduate or professional school*
- **Marshall Scholarship:** *For two years of graduate study in the UK or N. Ireland*
- **Mitchell Scholarship:** *For one year of graduate study in Ireland and N. Ireland*
- **NSF Graduate Research Fellowship:** *For study in sciences, technology, engineering and math fields*
- **Rhodes Scholarship:** *For two years of graduate study at Oxford University*



Please contact the Office of Nationally Competitive Scholarships when...

- You have a student who would make a good candidate.
- You have questions about the scholarships, recommendation letters or procedures.
- Email: ncs@wtamu.edu
- Tel: 806-651-2587
- Killgore Research Center, rm. 124
- Homepage: www.wtamu.edu/ncs



Letters of Recommendation: “Fantasy Land”

- The “fantasy land of letters of recommendation” is “a wondrous place...where people have excellent interpersonal skills and about a tenth of the inhabitants are among the finest I have ever worked with, and almost all are in the upper quarter.”
- (Dr. Richard Friedman (1983). *Fantasy Land*. New England Journal of Medicine, 308, p. 651-653)



Letters of Recommendation:

Their significance

- Recommendation letters can “make or break” a candidate’s application.
- When it comes down to the final selection, a weak letter is most often the reason for application failure.



Why?

- Programs are *highly* competitive:
 - Rhodes: 32 selected / 1200 applicants
 - Marshall: 40 selected / 1400 applicants
 - Truman: 80 selected / 700 applicants
 - Goldwater: 300 selected / 1200 applicants
- Candidates have similarly high GPA's, impressive CV's, leadership roles and outstanding qualities.
- Review committees are pressed for time.



Strong letters of Recommendation

- Invite us to imagine ourselves in the presence of the applicant. A vivid portrait is created.
- Are sincere, honest and fair evaluations of the student's performance and potential.
- Show the student as a exemplary leader, scholar and citizen.
- Persuade the reader that the applicant is an excellent match for the scholarship. It is the next logical step to achieving goals.
- Give concrete examples to illustrate these assertions.



Weak letters of Recommendation

- Are short, vague, unimaginative and uninformative.
- Are not tailored to the specific scholarship criteria.
- Summarize other application materials rather than expanding upon the content.
- Focus on the letter writer rather than the student.
- Present the student as mediocre.



Just say “No”

Don't agree to write a letter if...

- you don't know the student well enough.
- you feel you can't offer substantial support and examples.
- you don't have the time.
- the student doesn't approach you in a professional and responsible manner.
- you feel you are not the right person for the job.



If you agree to write a letter...

- *Please contact the Office of Nationally Competitive Scholarships.*
 - ncs@wtamu.edu
 - 806-651-2587
 - Specifications are available for each program
 - Deadlines for applications
 - On-line submission or “snail mail” details
 - Letter review



Supporting materials

The student should give you:

- A copy of his or her personal statement and project proposal
- A current résumé
- A current academic transcript
- A copy of reports, research, creative projects or other significant work



Supporting materials

The student should give you:

- A copy of additional materials relevant to the application
- A copy of the letter prompt or other requirements as stated per program
- The URL for the scholarship website
- An overview of other recommenders



Talk before you write

- You should review the materials and have at least one meeting with the applicant prior to writing the letter.
- Discuss the student's application, academic work, personal and professional goals, and extracurricular activities.
- How does the student fit into the stated mission of the scholarship foundation?



To waive or not to waive...

- How do you deal with letter confidentiality?
- Clarify your policy with the applicant.
- On the applications, students must choose to waive rights to view recommendation letters or not.
- Ask yourself, would you compose a “closed” letter differently from an “open” letter?



If you agree to write a letter...

Thank you.

Your time and contribution
are extremely valuable and greatly
appreciated!

