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.”

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 unininformative.

• 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!