

# Instructions for Requesting Letters of Recommendation

There will come a time during your undergraduate career when you will be requesting letters of recommendation from professors (in their role of teacher and/or lab supervisor) or teaching fellows. These letters may be for summer programs, grad school, fellowships, jobs, etc. Below are some guidelines that will help the process go smoothly. The list might look a little long, but it's probably things you would do anyway. At any rate, your efforts here will undoubtedly result in a more informative, punctual, and error-free letter.

When requesting a letter of recommendation, you should ask if the instructor:

- feels that he/she knows you well enough to write a strong letter.
- would like to see any of your problem sets, papers, or other items that might be helpful (in addition to the ones listed below).
- would like to meet with you to discuss your plans in more detail.
- would prefer to fill out an online form or a paper form, if the option exists.
- would like you to follow these guidelines. If not, then just ignore them and follow the instructor's procedure.

With regard to the first point above, it should be emphasized that the most important thing to do if you anticipate needing a recommendation letter somewhere down the line (which applies to virtually all of you!) is to *get to know at least a couple of your teachers very well*. Even if you did great in a class, your professor or TF can only write so much if he/she didn't get to know you. After a professor or TF has agreed to write a letter, you should give him/her the following items, nicely organized in a folder (or sent by email, for the items for which this is possible, if the instructor prefers -- just ask). If you then decide to apply to additional programs, just supplement the folder with the new materials. But try to give the instructor all of the programs at one time, because this keeps things more organized and reduces the chance of errors.

1. A detailed list of all the programs you're applying to. For each program, you should provide:

- Due date (specify if postmarked date or receipt date)
- Name and location of the program
- Website for the program
- Whom the letter should be addressed to
- How to submit the letter. Specify which of the three ways applies:
  1. Address to which the instructor should mail it. Note any accompanying forms.
  2. You pick up the letter in a signed and sealed envelope. Give the date you will pick it up. Note any accompanying forms.
  3. url of the online recommendation form (if known at this time).

2. Stamped and addressed envelopes for the letters that need to be mailed, along with any accompanying forms.

3. A transcript (you should be able to print one out from the web).

4. A list of courses taken from the instructor, the year and term, and the grade.

5. A resume, if you have one (this is a good excuse to write one).

6. A personal statement about why you want to do the program that you're applying to, and what your future plans are, etc. You will probably have to write such a statement for the applications anyway. This statement is a good opportunity to remind your instructor of any particular strengths you have, if a significant amount of time has passed (and even if not) from your main interaction with him/her.

Finally, ask the instructor if he/she would like to be reminded of the due dates by email.

## **The House File Option**

You may want to put some letters on file at the House Office. It is always a good idea to have copies of recommendations included in your House file as these letters will help provide source documentation for House letters.

In some cases, the House Office may be able to send or forward letters for you. This service should be used sparingly for items like pre-law, pre-med, or graduate school applications or significant fellowship competitions.

To place a letter on file with the House Office, you should take the following steps:

1. Give your recommender a completed Leverett House Recommendation Request/Waiver Form. (These are available in the House Office in the cubbyhole with the forms or online at <http://leverett1.harvard.edu/info/forms/Rec-Letter-Waiver.pdf>)
2. Give them a stamped envelope addressed to the Leverett House, Office of the Allston Burr Resident Dean, 28 DeWolfe Street, Cambridge MA 02138.
3. After the due date, check the rolodex in the House office (F-1) – Maura will show it to you - to determine whether or not the letter is in your file. If a letter you were expecting is not recorded, that means that the House did not get it, and you should follow up immediately with the recommender.
4. To have copies forwarded from the House to your fellowships/jobs/programs, you must supply us with the following approximately one week in advance of the due date:
  - a. a written request including your full name, class year, phone #, and which letters you would like and where they are to be sent
  - b. pre-addressed, pre-stamped envelopes with your name

Remember:

- Confidential recommendations cannot be sent to yourself.
- Letters from the House Office can only be sent to organizations or schools NOT to individuals. The only exception is that professors can be sent a copy of a letter they have written for you in the past.
- The House Office will send the letters out – it cannot give you a letter directly EXCEPT in certain cases when you will be dropping it off at OCS.
- In the end you alone are responsible for keeping track of your letters of recommendation and making sure they are received.