

HOW TO BUILD A COMPETITIVE RECOMMENDATION FOR THE NATIONAL FELLOWSHIP APPLICANT

I encourage recommenders to offer national committee readers:

- ❑ **Some context.** Experience has taught me that recommenders in the Midwest usually give too little information about themselves. Do not forget to include a few sentences that provide the reader with a sense of your expertise and your background as a scholar, educator, or mentor. This adds clarity to the narrative and can elevate your evaluation and the readers' impressions of nominee's accomplishments and experiences.
- ❑ **No more than two pages, but no less than one.** Selectors have a great deal to read and they must read quickly. When it is possible, I do recommend that writers go with a longer letter if they feel that they are able to do so with authenticity. Most opportunities require only three recommendations and our endorsement, so each letter is important to the committee's understanding of the student and their potential.
- ❑ **An "evidence-based" perspective on their nominee,** including **specific examples/stories** of the individual's contributions to the context the writer came to know them in as a student, thinker and researcher. It is not unusual for external committees to underestimate or be unfamiliar with the level of intellectual and practical opportunity undergraduates have access to the University of Iowa, in Iowa City and the state, so this step can be particularly important for nominees.
- ❑ **New information.** It is not necessary for recommenders to restate information, which is already present in the application file. GPA and major/degree information, as well significant honors and awards is well-covered territory. Insight into your unique experience with the applicant is what the selectors want and need in order to effectively evaluate the applicant.
- ❑ **A respectful salutation.** "To whom it may concern" will start the conversation off on the **wrong** foot. It is important to confirm that you are aware of the name and mission of the fellowship opportunity your student is pursuing. This is easily accomplished by using a tailored version of the salutation and opening sentence provided below:

To the 2017 Goldwater Scholarship Selectors:

I am honored to recommend Mr. John Smith as an outstanding candidate for a 2017 Goldwater Scholarship.

Please note: If you are adapting a past letter, please be careful to remove any language that references the original scholarship or research opportunity. This may seem like a small detail to us, but this kind of error does matter both readers and funding organizations and can hurt your applicant.

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