

## **Applying for a Summer Program or Graduate School: Asking for a Faculty Recommendation**

Summer internships and graduate schools generally request one or more faculty letter of recommendation to accompany your application. And, since they are competitive, you'll want your professor(s) to write the best possible letter they can to support your application. Here are some tips which will help the process:

- Be aware of application deadlines. Faculty are busy people! You can request that a professor send letters for you even before you complete your own part of the application. You will get the best letter from a relaxed professor, so give them as much advance notice as you possibly can. You will not earn any brownie points by asking for a recommendation to be completed by 5 pm on a day when you've finally gotten around to asking your professor and it's already 2:30 pm and they are dashing off to a faculty meeting; remember a crisis for you does not necessarily constitute an emergency for your professor.
- Choose your faculty carefully; this isn't a popularity contest. You don't necessarily need the professor you like the best. All faculty understand the importance of their recommendations and they take writing these letters very seriously. You want to pick faculty who know you well so they can positively but honestly speak to your academic record, abilities, and accomplishments.
- Gather all information needed by your professor. This includes the specific name of the program you are applying to (be aware that one department may be offering several programs) as well as the name and contact person for the program, any forms they may need to complete, the address (or url if it's online) where the recommendation is sent, and the deadline for their recommendation. You probably do not need to provide stationary, envelopes, or stamps – letters are generally printed out on university letterhead, faculty usually put the form and any letter they've written into a Stetson envelope, and most departments will take care of mailing the letter.
- Waive your right to see the recommendation. This is **very** important. Most places will have a form for you to sign before your professor completes it. You absolutely want to do this – if a program thinks you've seen a faculty recommendation, it will not be taken seriously.
- Develop a "brag" sheet. Presumably, you will be asking a professor who knows you well. But, that doesn't necessarily mean they can remember all the things you've done to distinguish yourself off the top of their head. List any honors, activities, leadership positions, research, work-study positions, etc. that are relevant to the program you're applying to. If you have any unique circumstances you want your professor to address specifically in their recommendation, this is a place to make note of that as well. Your professor will augment this brag sheet by looking at your academic record on My Stetson, so you don't have to worry about your grades. This doesn't necessarily have to be a formal resume, but do keep a copy for yourself as well, as it is the beginning of a formal resume or CV (a CV is the academic equivalent of a resume) that you'll probably develop once you are looking for work in the "real world."
- Thank your professor. Faculty are just like anyone else – they like to know their efforts are appreciated, so don't forget a simple "thanks for doing this for me" when you talk with them.
- Let them know everywhere you get in and where you decide to go. Faculty care a great deal about students, so share with them the results of your application process and where you decide to go. Also, letting your professor know is valuable information for your department, as it helps the department track students: their successes and their paths, and this is information that departments are often asked to compile for the university.

## Informational Questionnaire for Reference Letters

*(Feel free to give your responses on separate pages,  
so you have adequate space for all your answers)*

1. What is your name?
2. What position(s) are you applying for? Please list all institutions (including full addresses, other contact information, and contact person, if applicable) and dates when the material is due.
3. List any scholarships and academic honors that you have received.
4. List physics courses taken and the instructors' names.
5. Give details of employment within the physics, math, or other science departments. What items, what courses, what capacity, supervisor's name?
6. List any other campus (or off-campus during the school year) employment.
7. List any relevant\* work experience during summer break.
8. List any relevant\* extracurricular activities.
9. Are there any particular strengths or weaknesses on your transcript that should be emphasized or clarified? (e.g. have you done a lot of work in another area, such as a foreign language or music?)
10. Is there any specific evidence of your ability to communicate well in speaking and writing (e.g. public speaking experience, writing for the Reporter or other publications, advanced rhetoric courses)?
11. What do you perceive as your major strengths?
12. What are your immediate and long-range goals?
13. Is there anything else that might (or might not) be included to bolster your application? Reminding us of the details of talks or projects or any other relevant special efforts you have done (especially those you have done with the designated recommender) as these will enable us to personalize and greatly strengthen our letters.

\*Relevant should not be interpreted in a narrow sense of implying a direct relation to physics. In addition to that, cite evidence of your qualities of leadership, perseverance, organizational ability...