

Supporting Graduate Students for External Fellowships, Awards, and the Academic Job Market

Dr. Andrea Hilkovitz, External Funding Coordinator
Dr. Andrea Golato, Dean
The Graduate College



The rising STAR of Texas



Why do this

- Help others succeed
- Help your own career trajectory
- Help Texas State

Which role letters play

Letter of
Recommendation



- Confirm applicant's credentials
- Explain to committee how applicant meets (or ideally exceeds) award/scholarship/job criteria
- Help contextualize the information provided by the applicant
- Committees often rely on letters to decide among top-ranked applicants
 - Example: Celebrity Classic Scholarship has 5% acceptance rate. We regularly have more than 300 highly qualified applicants from across campus, many with a 4.0GPA. Letters explain / “translate” achievements in the discipline.

How to make the process manageable

- Communicate Expectations
 - In advising meetings
 - On your syllabus
 - On your homepage
- Reasonable Expectations
 - Request appropriate amount of time (3-4 weeks)
 - Ask for supporting documents
 - CV / Resume
 - Description of job / award / fellowship criteria
 - Applicant's statement
 - Deadline
 - Where to send information



What about truthfulness / integrity

- When and how to say no
- Enthusiasm for student's accomplishments / application needs to come across ... but no need to embellish
- Letter can be nuanced





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Dos and don'ts



Don't	Do
Use the same form letter for all students	Include student-specific information
Use the same letter for given student for all occasions	Tailor the content to the occasion
Have students write the their own letter	ask for talking points, or items to highlight
Be generic	Use language the funder / job ad uses
Argue by assertion	Provide examples / evidence / statistics / anecdotes to support your assertions
Understate	Use positive adjectives / adverbs
Embellish	Use nuanced language
Use gendered language	Use descriptors that are relevant to the occasion

Formatting Considerations

- Use the correct letterhead! It can be downloaded here
<http://www.umarketing.txstate.edu/resources/downloads/letterhead.html>
- Include your signature
 - Either print, sign, & scan
 - Or scan your signature, save it as an image and insert it
- Don't forget addressees contact info, the date, your contact info
- Be appropriate in length
 - Undergraduate student applications to graduate school: 1-2 pages
 - Graduate College scholarships: 1-2 pages
 - Applications for external scholarships: 2 pages (unless the requirements state differently)
 - Awards: 2 page minimum
 - Job applications: 2-3 pages
- Headings and/or topic sentences are absolutely fine
- Run a spell-check and a grammar-check
- For external fellowships: Take us up on our offer to review drafts



Building blocks of a letter



- First paragraph (for all letters)
 - how you know the student
 - for how long you have known the student
 - what the comparison group is (“student is among top 2% of the 800 graduate students I have taught in the last 5 years”)
- Subsequent paragraphs for letters supporting
 - **job applications:** One paragraph each for teaching, research, service. Be sure to address all job qualifications listed in the advertisement and anything else that sets the candidate apart.
 - **awards/fellowships:** evaluation criteria determine body paragraphs (one paragraph for each)
- Last paragraph (for all letters)
 - Summative evaluation
 - Beware of gendered language
 - Refrain from “please contact me if you need additional info” (All info ought to be in the letter!)

Questions?

