

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

TO THE STUDENT Some faculty members may not be used to writing the kinds of letters required for some of the highly competitive scholarships and fellowships. Be sure that the persons you select to write letters for you are informed. It may be helpful for you to supply them with a copy of your transcripts and any other pertinent information. You may wish to give them a copy of this sheet and certainly you should discuss with them the requirements of the scholarship or fellowship in question. If the faculty member cannot write a strong, positive letter of recommendation for you, then try to find another referee who can. If no one is willing to write such a letter, you should realistically reconsider your qualifications and perhaps speak to the fellowship advisor in the Honors office. Referees should be selected who can comment on your academic accomplishments or can evaluate unusual professional accomplishments.

TO THE FACULTY MEMBER Letters of recommendation most faculty are used to writing each year for students are, in general, not adequate for students applying for highly competitive awards such as the Mellon Fellowship, the Rhodes and Marshall scholarships, the NSF fellowships, Fulbright Grants, and so on. Before writing a letter for such a student, please consider the points below. If you cannot write this type of letter, you should tell the students about your reservations and let them decide whether or not to go elsewhere. If you do feel that the student is highly qualified for the award, you should write a very positive letter. Please remember that the boards that screen applicants have an excess of highly qualified students. They are looking for a reason--any reason--to eliminate candidates. There will be plenty of candidates who have no visible weaknesses, not even a weak letter of recommendation.

1. The letter should be detailed and extensive. Two or three pages are common. Remarks like, "He is an able student," do not count for much unless you explain your judgment. Please dwell on unusual accomplishments and talents.
2. There is no need to include negative statements about unusually strong students simply for a sense of balance. Such statements will very likely eliminate the student from further consideration. On the other hand, if you agree to write for an unqualified student, you should be candid.
3. Please be sure that the style and format of the letter will reflect positively on you and the university. If the reviewers are put off by the appearance of your letter, they will not take what you say or the candidate seriously.

We hope this will be no hardship for you. The few truly qualified candidates from BYU for these awards deserve our fullest support and every assistance we can give them.

Thank you for your cooperation.