

Letter of Recommendation Guidelines for Faculty Marshall and Rhodes Scholarships

All applicants for the Marshall and Rhodes scholarships must receive a letter of endorsement from their home university. The Office of Prestigious Awards and Fellowships (PAF) coordinates the selection process for UM students and eligible alumni seeking nomination for these awards. **Letters of recommendation are due to the PAF Office by August 4 as part of the student's application for UM endorsement.** This allows the UM Fellowship Committees time to review the application materials ahead of the campus interview period in August. If you are not able to provide a letter by August 4, please send it as soon as possible after that date or contact PAF with an approximate date. Letters should be submitted by e-mail as signed and scanned PDF documents. If the student you are supporting is applying for more than one fellowship, you may submit one letter to be considered by the UM Faculty Committee for all nomination bids. **If the student is nominated you will be asked to provide final updated letters for each of the fellowship programs in September.**

Here are some general guidelines for fellowship recommendations:

What Helps

- **Provide context of how you know the applicant**
- **Provide specific information about the applicant** – Address the student's academic performance and extracurricular engagement with examples that demonstrate that you know the applicant personally, if relevant. Please do not repeat information available in other parts of the application unless you have a different view or perspective. How can you comment on the student's performance and engagements in ways that other recommenders may not based on your observations of the student?
- **Discuss why the applicant would be a strong candidate for the specific fellowship.** How does this candidate exemplify the personal qualities or selection criteria specified by the fellowship? What specific experiences have you had with the student that leads you to think they have the potential for success in this fellowship and their future goals?
- **Indicate what particularly qualifies the student for the course of study that the applicant is proposing.**
- **Place the student in a larger context of your experience.** For example, a letter could compare the present applicant to others who have applied for similar honors in the past or who have succeeded in such competitions, top-tier graduate programs, etc. However, any comparison should be qualitative, not quantitative.
- **Draw on the remarks of colleagues** for supporting evidence of specific strengths. Letters may also draw on the comments from TAs or others who may have worked more closely with the applicants.
- **Be candid but not negative.** These grant foundations are looking for realistic evaluations of students rather than overly positive hyperbole which may be unfounded.

What Hurts

- **Generic letters** or letters for another purpose sent without regard to the specific fellowship, course of study, or project proposed.
- **Letters that merely summarize** information available elsewhere in the application
- **Letters that consist largely of unsupported praise.** Kind words that do not give committees a strong sense of how applicants have distinguished themselves are not helpful. Similarly, comments indicating that a student did what might be expected (completed all the reading assignments) or that point to qualities (punctuality, enthusiasm, presentability) not germane to the fellowship may hurt the applicant.
- **Quantitative comparisons** such as sharing that a student is in the top 5% of students you've worked with. Nothing hurts an application more than sharing numbers, especially unflattering ones, without detailed explanations or experiences that demonstrate how that holds true.

Additional Guidelines

- Address letters to the relevant scholarship committee (Rhodes, Marshall, etc.) or “To The UM Fellowship Committee” if the letter will be considered for multiple endorsements.
- Make sure the letter is dated and printed on department or other appropriate letterhead.
- Letters for major fellowships are usually 1.5-2 pages single-spaced.

You should decline a letter request if:

- You feel that you do not emphatically support of a student
- You recall little more about a student than the recorded grades
- You think that you are not the best person to write a letter
- A student approaches you in an unprofessional manner
- You do not have the time or material to write a good letter

The Ideal Candidate

When writing the recommendation, the foundations ask you to please provide concrete evidence to support one or more of the following criteria specific to each fellowship. Do not feel that you should address all criteria. It is best to speak to your own experience of the student and his/her work.

Rhodes (for 2 years of post-baccalaureate study at Oxford University)

In making appointments, the Committees of Selection will have regard to the qualities laid down by Cecil Rhodes... “literary and scholastic attainments; truthfulness, courage, devotion to duty, sympathy for and protection of the weak, kindliness, unselfishness, and fellowship; exhibition of moral force of character and of instincts to lead and to take an interest in one’s contemporaries; physical vigor...” “Selection committees are charged to seek excellence in qualities of the mind and in qualities of person which, in combination, offer the promise of effective service to the world in the decades ahead. The Rhodes Scholarships, in short, are investments in individuals rather than project proposals. Accordingly, applications are sought from talented students without restriction as to their field of academic specialization or career plans, although the proposed course of study must be available at Oxford, and the applicant’s undergraduate program must provide a sufficient basis for study in the proposed field.”

Marshall (for 1-2 years of graduate study at any UK Institution)

“In appointing Marshall Scholars the selectors will look for distinction of intellect and character as evidenced both by their scholastic attainments and by their other activities and achievements. Preference will be given to candidates who combine a high academic ability with the capacity to play an active part in the life of the UK University to which they go, and to those who display potential to make a significant contribution to their society. The Marshall scholarship is looking for: <http://www.marshallscholarship.org/applications/criteria>

Please e-mail the letters to prestigiousawards@miami.edu and save a copy for future reference. If you have questions about letters of recommendation please contact Erika Liberis at (305) 284-5385.