

The Art of Recommendation Writing

WACAC Share, Learn and Connect

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Types of Recommendations

- **The Counselor . . .** describing the student within the entire school community
- **The Teacher . . .** describing the student in the classroom

Purpose of Letters

- Will the student be able to do the work in the classroom?
- Will the student do the work?
- How will the student fit into the college community? As a contributor? As a distraction?

Purpose, cont.

- Let the college admission officer know something that is not on the transcript, in the profile, on the application

i.e. AP US History is the hardest course at our school, teacher only awarded 2 A's at semester

mother is suffering from severe depression, so Johnny does the shopping, cleaning and supervises his two brothers

Context of the Letters

- Admission officer is “reading” 100 – 200 applications per week
- Letters are included with transcripts, SSRs, test scores, interview reports, the application, essays, etc.!!!!
- Territory manager often reading letters from multiple counselors/teachers from same school consistency is important

The Counselor Letter

Logistics for the Counselor Letter

- List of colleges . . . how impt is this letter?
- Timing . . . when due?
- Knowing the student
 - Meetings with the student (gush)
 - Senior Brag Sheet / Questionnaire
 - Teacher notes
 - Parent reference

Counselor Ratings

Consistency . . . different levels of colleges

- academic rigor
- extra curricular involvement /leadership
- character

Same for all counselors writing letters!

The Counselor Letter

- Part of the Secondary School Report --
SSR
- Electronic add-on the Common App or
NACAC SSR?
- Sent with transcript and SSR

The Letter Itself

- One page . . . skimmable
- Student name at the top
- Not repeating the student resume

The Letter, cont.

- A theme in the first paragraph
- ***Tell the story***
- Mention family only if relevant
- Include actual recommendation

Adjustments to the Letter

- For individual college, if you are an alum
- For types of colleges (highly selective or reach vs. safety)
- Mention activity or major if relevant

Difficult Cases

- Disciplinary ratings / information
 - Academic
 - Character
- Student not a “fit” for the institution

Remain true to yourself and your school!

The Teacher Recommendation

Logistics for the Teacher Letter

- Timing of requests from students
- A request form
- Deadlines
- Reminders . . . About the student in the classroom (“what is it like when Johnny is not there?”) . . . not a repeat of the resume or school community endorsement

Teacher Letters . . . training

- Understand the reason colleges ask for the letters (truly want their opinions about the student in the classroom)
- One page . . . Student name at top of page
- Accompanies Common App or other Teacher Rec form
- No need to complete “ratings” but should be consistent . . . Really only a few in my career are top students!

Vocabulary / Text

Avoid . . .

- Gross generalizations
- Physical descriptors, unless they go against type
- Passive descriptors
- Using “the best” unless it’s true!
- And be careful about “quiet”

Include:

- Very active words
- Descriptions of student's passions if they exist
- Examples of overcoming obstacles

Samples

- The bright, overwhelmed student
- The problem student
- The good kid
- The superstar

Questions?