Dear College: How to Write Compelling Letters of Recommendation

Welcome to PCACAC’s Virtual 18th Annual Summer Institute

Session B4
Tuesday, July 13
## Meet Your Presenters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presenter</th>
<th>Email</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David ‘Butch’ Hamilton</td>
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<td>St. Mary’s College of Maryland</td>
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<td>Learning Objectives</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>• Examine what college admission professionals view as the essential aspects of LORs.</td>
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<td>• Develop a system/approach for writing LORs to ensure you include what is necessary and maximize time.</td>
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<td>• Consider the impact of COVID-19 on LORs for the upcoming year and beyond.</td>
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Who’s in the Room?

What is your role?

How many years of experience do you have in your role?

Let’s use the knowledge in the room!

https://padlet.com/allielrobertson/17mkyc4xs05b72t
## NACAC State of College Admission Report

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<th>Factor</th>
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How Colleges Read Files

“Data-Driven” Read
This is a focus on the more quantitative pieces of the app - # of Honors/AP/IB courses, overall GPA, core GPA, SAT/ACT/AP/IB scores.

“Holistic” Read
This includes a focus on qualitative pieces on information within the application - recommendations, essays, activities and awards AND objective indicators.
Colleges are looking for...

What makes the student unique and how the student will contribute to the life of our campus?

**Academic character**
- Classroom contributions, collaboration, intellectual curiosity, quality of work

**Extracurricular activities/engagements**
- Time management/balance, interests, commitment to service (breadth, depth and impact)

**Personal qualities/fit**
- Leadership
- Initiative
- Grit/resilience
- Sense of social responsibility
- Willingness to take risks
- Additional factors

Your Job isn’t to get the student admitted. It’s about supporting the student’s admission process.
Managing the Process

Logistics

- Solicit information from the student and family, if possible.
- Create timelines.

Remember what colleges are looking for AND consider the style/structure of your letter.
The ‘Brag’ Sheet/Rec Packet

What is a ‘Brag’ Sheet?

No matter how much (or little) you know about a student...these can help steer your writing!

Talk this up early and often!

Use our menu as a guide. Questions include information about:
- Family & Home
- Academics
- Extracurriculars
- Something fun or quirky

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ZUeei0IrJ2v_VfZb5pdgP4y21hNvSCKJfudEL2qPHHE/edit?usp=sharing
Let’s Talk Logistics...

The Process at SMR

February 2022 - At a junior class assembly, students will be asked to submit up to four names of teachers from whom they would like to receive a recommendation. All preference lists collected at this time.

Early March 2022 - College advisor will compile a list of student names and forward those to each teacher. Teachers then pick their preferences and respond back to college advisor by mid-March.
Let’s Talk Logistics...

**Late March 2022** - Once teacher preferences have been determined, college advisor will make a match for one letter of recommendation between the student and teacher.

**Early April 2022** - Teachers given their list of students they are responsible for in terms of writing recommendation letters.

**Early April 2022** - Students will receive their confirmation regarding the recommendation assignment. Students will also need to complete an Academic Information Sheet in their Naviance account as well as their resume.
May 2022 - A professional development day/writing workshop will be held for faculty to write recommendation letters. Teachers will have access to any student’s Academic Information Sheet and Resume in Naviance.

June 2022 - As part of check out for teachers, their recommendation letters need to be uploaded into Naviance and emailed to the Registrar.
Lessons Learned...

**Three Questions that I Love:**
1. What do you want to learn more about? Possible areas of study in college? (i.e., major)
2. List the books you have read in the last 12 months (not books assigned in school).
3. What problems do you want to solve?

**Benefits**
- Accountability
- Managed
- No last minute asking
- No one overwhelmed

**Drawbacks**
- Additional work
- Student without a match?
- What if a college requires a second letter?
- Teachers moving on.
Let's Talk Logistics...

Large, Public High School
~2900 students, 11 Gen Ed counselors

Most report desire to apply to
four-year college, most apply EA
(80%+)  ~20% first generation

Packet due June 1 of Junior Year

- Student Information
- Parent/Guardian Information
- Student Resume

**Personal Preference** - Use time in
summer to draft letters, identify ‘gaps’
of information, touch base via email
in summer or during graduation
planning meeting in late September

https://sites.google.com/view/chsclass2022/home
Lessons Learned...

- Share example responses
- Interview students
- Encourage another perspective
- Use this as an opportunity to teach!
- Review annually with your team

Three Questions that I Love:
1. What are you passionate about?
2. Name your favorites (book, song, YouTube video, expression, joke, etc.)
3. What three points would you like me to highlight in your letter?
Supporting Teachers

Provide Professional Development for Teachers at Beginning of Year
- College Admission ‘Lesson’
- Counselor Letter v. Teacher Letter
- Sample Questions

Encourage students to consider what’s required and what’s allowed for colleges on their list
Student makes initial ‘Ask’ in the Spring of Junior Year

Sample Teacher Rec Memo for Students (back up)
College Perspective

Do
● Tell a Story, Give Anecdotal Support
● Be Honest
● Provide Context and Be Specific
● Update your School Profile

Don’t
● Throw a kid under the bus if you don’t have much to say
● List the GPA
● Be afraid to address the elephant in the room
Let’s Talk Format...

Teacher Recommendation
- Student’s Experience with Curriculum
- Academic and Intellectual Growth
- Personal Qualities
- Recommendation

Questions?

Use the Resources posted to the Padlet:
https://padlet.com/allielrobertson/17mkyc4xs05b72t
YOUR FEEDBACK MATTERS!

Please complete a session evaluation at www.pcacac.org/summer-institute.

Thank you!