

Letters of Recommendation Service

The Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences provides a service to its undergraduate majors by keeping letters of recommendation on file and, at the student's request, sending them to prospective graduate schools, professional schools, or employers. Most undergraduate students, at some point in their academic careers, need letters of recommendation to support their applications for scholarships, fellowships, or for employment or postgraduate professional school opportunities. This brochure outlines the major features and conditions for using the Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences's letter of recommendation service. It is the responsibility of each student needing such letters to contact potential evaluators to write these letters.

Characteristics for Letters of Recommendation

Specific letters of recommendation vary, depending on the qualities of the candidate as well as the evaluator. Whenever possible, these letters should evaluate your ability to handle concepts in your area of study, your post-graduate educational and/or employment potential, and/or relevant personal characteristics that may affect your potential for success in your chosen field of endeavor. The evaluator also usually states his/her basis for the evaluation (i.e., class work, independent study, honors thesis, field study, personal interactions, etc.).

Obtaining Letters of Recommendation

Letters should be solicited from individual faculty in the Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences who have had sufficient opportunity to evaluate your potential for postgraduate work or employment. Provision of these letters is not an obligation on the part of the evaluator, and you must remember to provide enough lead-time to meet any existing deadlines associated with the application process. A deadline crisis on your part does not constitute a crisis for the person agreeing to provide a letter of recommendation on your behalf.

Procedures for Using the Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences Letters of Recommendation Service

Students wishing to use the service must follow these directions:

1. Read and complete the **Letter of Recommendation Request Form**, including the **Access to Confidential Statements** form on the reverse side. Return this sheet to the Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences main office at least 15 working days prior to your earliest application deadline for postgraduate education or employment.
2. A maximum of four evaluator letters will be mailed to a maximum of ten institutions (as indicated on Letter of Recommendation Request Form). Due to workload issues, we cannot exceed these departmentally established limits.
3. Ask evaluators (from the Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences) to provide letters of recommendation on your behalf at least 15 working days prior to an application deadline. Letters must be typewritten, but not addressed. The Department cannot provide support to evaluators in other departments.

4. Students are responsible for providing stamped, pre-addressed envelopes in which their letters will be sent. The pre-addressed envelopes should contain the student's name in the bottom left-hand corner (e.g., "Recommendation for John Doe") to avoid any possible error. For the same reason, it is also recommended that the name of the evaluator be typed in the return address space at the top left-hand corner of the envelope.
5. All Letters of Recommendation will be mailed **directly** to the institution and cannot be returned to the student personally. There are 2 exceptions to this policy:
 - a. Letters for students who have not waived their right to access (the department will notify the letter writer that the student has **not** waived their right to access when file is opened).
 - b. Letters to institutions that have specifically provided students with envelopes for the purpose of the letters being included with the application.
6. If there is a letter in the file and the evaluator is not longer in the department, and cannot be contacted for permission to release the letter to the student, the letter cannot be released to the student. The service will send the letter of recommendation directly to the institution, but we cannot release it to the student without the letter writer's written permission.
7. Evaluators will submit a printed copy of their letter of recommendation on departmental letterhead to the Psychology main office.
8. The Department will retain one copy of each letter written on behalf of a student. Once an initial letter is on file, a student requesting that the letter(s) be sent to additional persons/institutions (according to the Coverages and Exclusions Statement) must submit additional stamped, pre-addressed envelopes to the Psychology main office for mailing according to the deadlines established above. A note will be made on the student's Letter of Recommendation Request Form indicating the date his/her letters are mailed.
9. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that each of their evaluator's letters arrive in the Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences main office at least **15** working days prior to the earliest application deadline. Failure to do so may cause your letters of recommendation to be sent after an application deadline has passed.

You can assist the evaluator by providing, at the time of your request for a letter, a concise academic autobiography, and any other information you think pertinent to your request. The academic autobiography should indicate courses; field work; research; or honor theses completed that are relevant to your field of interest; your overall grade point average and your grade point average in your major; relevant extracurricular activities; copies or papers and/or tests from classes taught by the evaluator, and any other autobiographical information that you think might be relevant for your request. You should also describe the general type of postgraduate program, employment opportunity, or other program or professional opportunity you wish to pursue, as well as the application deadlines for each.

Some post graduate educational and professional school programs and potential employers require evaluators to fill out a specialized recommendation form. A letter of recommendation on departmental or agency letterhead can usually take the place of these forms. Nevertheless, if you would like them sent with your letter(s), you should complete these forms and include them along with your stamped, pre-addressed envelopes for processing at the time you request your letter(s).

Letter of Recommendation File Service Coverages and Exclusions

Services covered

1. Establishing and maintaining a file of letters of recommendation written on the student's behalf by evaluators selected by the student.
NOTE: Due to the large number of students requesting letters to support their applications to graduate school or other employment, the Department will only send a maximum of four (4) letters from different faculty to a maximum of ten (10) institutions or agencies.
2. Maintaining your letter of recommendation file for up to five (5) academic years from the time your file is opened.
3. Ask evaluators (from the Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences) to provide letters of recommendation on your behalf at least 15 working days prior to an application deadline. Letters must be typewritten, but not addressed. The Department cannot provide support to evaluators in other departments.
4. Students are responsible for providing stamped, pre-addressed envelopes in which their letters will be sent. The pre-addressed envelopes should contain the student's name in the bottom left-hand corner (e.g., "Recommendation for John Doe") to avoid any possible error. For the same reason, it is also recommended that the name of the evaluator be typed in the return address space at the top left-hand corner of the envelope.
5. All Letters of Recommendation will be mailed directly to the institution and cannot be returned to the student personally. There are 2 exceptions to this policy:
 - a. Letters for students who have not waived their right to access (the department will notify the letter writer that the student has **not** waived their right to access when file is opened).
 - b. Letters to institutions that have specifically provided students with envelopes for the purpose of the letters being included with the application.
6. If there is a letter in the file and the evaluator is not longer in the department, and cannot be contacted for permission to release the letter to the student, the letter cannot be released to the student. The service will send the letter of recommendation directly to the institution, but we cannot release it to the student without the letter writer's written permission.
7. Evaluators will submit a printed copy of their letter of recommendation on departmental letterhead to the Psychology main office.
8. The Department will retain one copy of each letter written on behalf of a student. Once an initial letter is on file, a student requesting that the letter(s) be sent to additional persons/institutions (according to the Coverages and Exclusions Statement) must submit additional stamped, pre-addressed envelopes to the Psychology main office for mailing according to the deadlines established above. A note will be made on the student's Letter of Recommendation Request Form indicating the date his/her letters are mailed.
9. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that each of their evaluator's letters arrive in the Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences main office at least 15 working days prior to the earliest application deadline. Failure to do so may cause your letters of recommendation to be sent after an application deadline has passed.

Services Excluded

The following are **not** covered by the Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences

1. Meeting emergency deadlines for sending letters from your file with less than 15 working days notification.
2. Ensuring that all relevant letters of recommendation are on file in time to meet an application deadline. This is the responsibility of the individual student.
3. Providing additional services beyond those associated with maintaining and sending letters of recommendation from your file. The Department will not edit, modify, or retype any letters of recommendation in the file, nor will the Department complete accompanying forms. It is the responsibility of the candidate and evaluators to make certain that letters in the file are in final edited form and accompanying forms are completed.
4. Maintaining a candidate's file past five (5) academic years.
5. Responsibility for letters written by individuals outside of the Department.
6. Returning letters of recommendation to students personally. All letters will be sent directly to the institutions. There are two exceptions to this policy:
 - a. Letters for students who have **not** waived their right to access (the department will notify the letter writer that the student has **not** waived their right to access when file is opened).
 - b. Letters to institutions that have specifically provided the student with envelopes for the purpose of the letters being included with the application.