



UNC
COLLEGE OF
ARTS & SCIENCES

THE UNIVERSITY
of NORTH CAROLINA
at CHAPEL HILL

JAMES M. JOHNSTON CENTER FOR
UNDERGRADUATE EXCELLENCE

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Dear Potential Reference:

You are being approached by a student to write a recommendation for a scholarship for which the competition will be very strong – Rhodes, Marshall, Truman, Mitchell, Churchill, Goldwater, Luce, Cooke, Carnegie, Beinecke, Udall and Boren, etc. – because this student believes that you are uniquely qualified to comment in some detail on his or her academic achievements. Because of the importance of these letters in national competition and because the nature of the letter is somewhat different from other letters we sometimes write, here are some things you may wish to consider in writing the letter:

1. Before agreeing to write the letter, you may find it useful to assess the extent to which you know this student's academic strengths and accomplishments. If you do not know the student beyond the graded work for the course, you might write a helpful letter for employment or graduate school, but the letter will be of little use and could be harmful at the level of national competition, and it is perhaps better to decline the offer to write. It is also obviously better to decline if you have reservations about the strengths of this student: negative remarks will almost certainly contribute to the detriment of the student's application.
2. If you agree to write the letter, please take some time to discuss with the student his or her academic curriculum at UNC (and perhaps abroad), plans for graduate work and other related activities. Ask the student to provide you with copies of papers and other submitted work written for your course that contain your remarks. Did you have interaction with the student outside class hours? Is it possible you could share an anecdote that might capture the student's strengths or further bring the student to life for the reader? What truly makes this student unique in your eyes? Is this an applicant you can honestly say is among best students in however many years you've been teaching? Again, only in detail can a letter truly assist the student in winning these scholarships.

If you have any questions about deadlines or the format in which the letter is to be submitted or any other kinds of questions, please contact me (lensing@email.unc.edu) or call my office in care of Trent Johnson: 843-7757.

Thanks for your assistance to this student. I am personally aware of the time that goes into the preparation of a strong letter and the gathering of information that it entails.

Sincerely,

George Lensing

Director, Office of Distinguished Scholarships
and Professor of English