

# CHOOSING AND CONTACTING REFERENCES

for STEM Undergraduate Research Program Applications

Presented by Joan Kang, SMC Career Services Center



# WORKSHOP AGENDA

## TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED

- Difference between a list of references vs. a letter of recommendation
- Benefits of networking
- How to build meaningful connections with your professors
- Who, when, how, and what in terms of references and recommendation letters
- Post Request Actions
- Advice from Recommenders

# REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

- **References** - People you have listed on a self-created document or on a provided fillable form who can be contacted to speak on your qualifications and credibility, typically via a phone conversation or survey questionnaire
- **Letter of Recommendations** - Written letters detailing why and how you best qualify for the specific opportunity. It should be addressed directly to the opportunity and are most often sent directly to the selection committee rather than delivered to the applicant.





# NETWORKING 101 TIPS

Forming relationships with those who can help you get to where you want to go

- Build networks in your everyday routine
- Get involved on campus
- Attend on campus events
- Reach out to the Career Services Center
- Develop your online presence
- Be open to new connections
- Don't be afraid to make the first move
- Cultivate your networks



# BUILDING MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS WITH YOUR PROFESSORS

- Start early and be proactive/Make a plan
- Introduce yourself
- Have patience/Respect their time
- Foster communication
  - Ask questions/Show a genuine interest/See as well as offer help
  - Participate meaningfully in class, office hours, review sessions, academic events, etc.
  - Communicate respectfully and professionally
  - Talk about your professional goals/Ask for their thoughts
- Take feedback seriously
- Enroll in multiple classes with the same professor
- Stay in touch/Show appreciation

# IDEAL INDIVIDUALS TO ASK

## CHOOSE INDIVIDUALS BASED ON THE PROGRAM/SPECIALITY AREA

- Faculty in the same field/discipline as the program/specialty area
  - i.e., For a math research opportunity, ask a math professor
- Faculty in a related field/discipline as the program/specialty area
  - i.e., For an engineering research opportunity, if you have never taken an engineering course, ask a professor who has taught you a skill used by engineers, such as a math or physics professor.
- Individuals who are aware of your research capabilities
  - i.e., PI, Research Mentor, etc.
- Choose people who know you well and can speak highly of you academically as well as your ability to succeed in a research setting.
- Choose people who have directly witnessed your technical skillset versus know of or heard of
- Avoid friends/family members/former high school teachers

# WHEN SHOULD I ASK?

## IF YOU ARE ACTIVELY READY TO APPLY

- Ideally, at least 4 to 6 weeks before the research application deadline. Then, a reminder before the application deadline, if not already received. Be prepared to provide any application materials to your reference/recommendation letter writers. Draft versions are okay unless otherwise requested. *Note some research applications will not contact references or send recommendation letter links until the applicant has submitted a complete application.*

## FOR AN OPPORTUNITY SOME TIME IN THE NEAR FUTURE

- If you know you want to apply for research opportunities, but it isn't application season and/or the application deadline is not posted, this is a great time to work on cultivating professional relationships. Schedule a meeting with your potential references. Involve them in your search process. Ask them if they are aware of any opportunities. Discuss your career and academic goals with them.



# THE INTIAL ASK

## **CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN AN ON-GROUND CLASS**

Make the request in person whether before/after class or during office hours. If in support, follow-up the conversation with an email containing the details of the program or a professional response to a declined offer.

## **CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN AN ONLINE CLASS**

If permitted, log into your class session early or stay a bit after class ends. If not, visit during office hours. If in support, follow-up the conversation with an email containing the details of the program or provide a professional response to a declined offer.

## **PREVIOUSLY ENROLLED, BUT NO LONGER IN THE CLASS**

Try to identify when the person has office hours and reach out during those hours. Contact their department for more information on office hours. If in support, follow-up the conversation with an email containing the details of the program or provide a professional response to a declined offer. If unable to make an in-person request, reintroduce yourself via email. Wait for response and follow-up accordingly.



# THE INITIAL ASK - WHAT TO INCLUDE

## **YOUR REQUEST**

Politely and professionally ask for the person to serve as a reference and/or write your recommendation letter. Never list people without permission/agreement.

## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND REQUIREMENTS**

Provide a brief description of the program and specific research area for which you are applying, timeline (preferred timeline and actual application deadline), research program website link, and any reference/recommendation letter requirements

## **REASONS WHY YOU WANT TO APPLY FOR THIS PROGRAM AND WHY YOU CHOSE THEM**

Share with them what interests you about the program (i.e., career and major goals) and why you asked for them to speak about you.

## **APPRECIATION/THANKS**

End with thanking them for their time and consideration and wait for their response.

# THE "YES" RESPONSE - WHAT TO INCLUDE

## **APPRECIATION/THANKS**

Thank them for agreeing to serve as your reference/recommendation letter writer.

## **PROGRAM CONTACT INFORMATION AND DELIVERY METHOD**

Include the individual/program name to whom they are sending the letter and how they will be providing their reference/recommendation letter to the program

## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION AND REQUIREMENTS**

Reiterate a brief description of the program and specific research area for which you are applying, application deadline, research program website link, reference/letter submission requirements, etc.

## **APPLICATION MATERIALS**

Share drafts/final copies of your application materials (i.e. personal statement, targeted resume, unofficial transcripts, supplemental question responses, etc.)

# DECLINED OFFER - HOW TO RESPOND

## **APPRECIATION/THANKS**

Thank them for their time and consideration.

## **ASK FOR FEEDBACK**

There are many reasons why someone might decline to serve as your reference. Politely and respectfully inquire about the reason for declining and see if a response is given.

## **FOLLOW-UP ON THE RECEIVED FEEDBACK**

Review their feedback and if applicable, work on the feedback received.

## **ACCEPT YOUR FEELINGS/STAY POSITIVE**

It is natural to feel hurt when you have been turned down. Treat yourself with compassion. View the response as a learning opportunity. Focus on the next step, which is moving forward and preparing for the next person to ask.

# POST REQUEST ACTIONS

- **Reminder Email** - If you haven't received notification that the recommendation letter/reference has been sent or received, send a friendly reminder. Typically this can happen 3 to 5 days before the application deadline.
- **Received Thank You Email** - Send a thank you note once your recommendation letter/reference has been received.
- **Decision Follow-Up Email** - Once you received a decision from the research program, regardless of the outcome, send an update as well as your appreciation for their time.





# ADVICE FROM RECOMMENDERS

- Reach out to us early. Don't wait until the last minute to ask.
- Though we may want to write a recommendation letter for you, we can't always provide a quick turnaround or may have a full plate that we can't.
- If we don't know you, we may not be the best person to serve as your reference and/or write a recommendation letter for you.
- We need to know the reason for the letter. Provide us with the program details and possibly your application materials (resume/cv, personal statement, transcripts, etc. Share with us your interests and goals. Ask us if we need anything else.
- Keep in contact with us regularly. Coming out of the blue from a year ago, sometimes even a semester ago, might make it hard for us to write a letter for you.
- Just because you received an A in my course, doesn't mean we can write a recommendation letter for you. You need to be engaged in my course. Ask questions. Help others.
- You've asked us to serve as your reference or write a recommendation letter for you. Don't forget to keep us posted on whether you were offered the research opportunity
- It is nice to see a list of your achievements, application materials, resume, etc. It might help us with your letter/reference.

# CAMPUS RESOURCES



## CAREER CENTER

Assist with major/career exploration and employment related resources

## ENGLISH 1E ONLINE WRITING CONSULTATION

Noncredit, free, online course that offers students feedback on rough drafts

## COUNSELING DEPARTMENT

23 unique programs available to provide counseling support services

## STEM/MAS PROGRAM

Program specifically geared to support your STEM goals

## INSTRUCTIONAL FACULTY

Ask faculty you are familiar with to review your application

## WRITING AND HUMANITIES TUTORING CENTER (WHTC)

Writing support in any subject and at any stage in the writing process

# HOW DO I CONTACT THE CAREER CENTER FOR MORE INFORMATION?



[APPOINTMENTS WITH THE CAREER CENTER](#)



[CAREER CENTER CONTACT INFO](#)



[CAREER CENTER SOCIAL MEDIA](#)



[CAREER CENTER WORKSHOP RECORDINGS](#)

# CONTACT INFO

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Senior Career Services Advisor

AOIs: STEM and Health and Wellness



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Student Services Center  
Career Services (1st Floor)





# ADDENDUM: TEMPLATES

## EMAIL AND IN-PERSON EXAMPLES

- The Initial Ask
- Responding to a Decision
- Post Response Actions

# INITIAL ASK TEMPLATES

## CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN ON-GROUND CLASS - IN PERSON

Hi (Name of Professor),

I am applying to (Include name of research opportunity). The application requires two recommendation letters to be sent directly to (Include name of research opportunity) by (state your deadline). This research program focuses on (include what the program focuses on) and I am particularly interested in (state what area of the research program that interests you) because (share why that area interests you). Would you be willing to write one of my letters of support? I believe that your experience as my (state the courses taken with that professor) professor would be a valuable addition to my application because (share reason/reasons why).

If you are able support my application, I can provide you with additional information about the application process, instructions on how to send your recommendation letter, my application materials including my (i.e. tailored resume, draft answers to application questions, personal statement) as well as a list of qualities that (Include name of research opportunity) is looking for in a candidate, which if you can speak to any or all of the qualities and how I exhibit them, I would much appreciate it.

# INITIAL ASK TEMPLATES- CONT'D 1

## CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN ONLINE CLASS - EMAIL/PHONE

(Hi or Dear) (Name of Professor),

I hope all is well with you. I am currently enrolled in your (state name of class and section #) this (state current term and year). I am applying to (Include name of research opportunity). The application requires two recommendation letters to be sent directly to (Include name of research opportunity) by (state your deadline). This research program focuses on (include what the program focuses on) and I am particularly interested in (state what area of the research program that interests you) because (share why that area interests you). Would you be willing to write one of my letters of support? I believe that your experience as my (state the currently enrolled course as well as any previously courses taken with that same professor) professor would be a valuable addition to my application because (share reason/reasons why).

If you are able support my application, I can provide you with additional information about the application process, instructions on how to send your recommendation letter, my application materials including my (i.e. tailored resume, draft answers to application questions, personal statement) as well as a list of qualities that (Include name of research opportunity) is looking for in a candidate, which if you can speak to any or all of the qualities and how I exhibit them, I would much appreciate it.

Sincerely,

(Your First and Last Name)

## IF LEAVING A VOICEMAIL ADD THE FOLLOWING

Should you have any questions or thoughts, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can make myself available by phone at (state area code and phone number), email at (state email address), zoom, and/or in-person. I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your time and consideration.

# INITIAL ASK TEMPLATES- CONT'D 2

## PREVIOUSLY ENROLLED, MEETING IN-PERSON

Hi (Name of Professor),

I hope all is well with you since I took your (state name of class and section #) during the (state term and year you completed the course). I wanted to share with you what I have been doing since my enrollment in your course. (Share any academic/career updates)

I am also applying to (Include name of research opportunity). The application requires two recommendation letters to be sent directly to (Include name of research opportunity) by (state your deadline). This research program focuses on (include what the program focuses on) and I am particularly interested in (state what area of the research program that interests you) because (share why that area interests you). Would you be willing to write one of my letters of support? I believe that your experience as my (state the courses taken with that professor) professor would be a valuable addition to my application because (share reason/reasons why).

If you are able support my application, I can provide you with additional information about the application process, instructions on how to send your recommendation letter, my application materials including my (i.e. tailored resume, draft answers to application questions, personal statement) as well as a list of qualities that (Include name of research opportunity) is looking for in a candidate, which if you can speak to any or all of the qualities and how I exhibit them, I would much appreciate it.



# INITIAL ASK TEMPLATES - CONT'D 3

## PREVIOUSLY ENROLLED, EMAIL WHEN YOU CAN'T MEET IN PERSON

(Hi or Dear) (Name of Professor),

I hope all is well with you since I took your (state name of class and section #) during the (state term and year you completed the course). I wanted to share with you what I have been doing since my enrollment in your course. (Share any academic/career updates)

I am also applying to (Include name of research opportunity). The application requires two recommendation letters to be sent directly to (Include name of research opportunity) by (state your deadline). This research program focuses on (include what the program focuses on) and I am particularly interested in (state what area of the research program that interests you) because (share why that area interests you). Would you be willing to write one of my letters of support? I believe that your experience as my (state the courses taken with that professor) professor would be a valuable addition to my application because (share reason/reasons why).

If you are able support my application, I can provide you with additional information about the application process, instructions on how to send your recommendation letter, my application materials including my (i.e. tailored resume, draft answers to application questions, personal statement) as well as a list of qualities that (Include name of research opportunity) is looking for in a candidate, which if you can speak to any or all of the qualities and how I exhibit them, I would much appreciate it.

Sincerely,

(Your First and Last Name)

# YES RESPONSE TEMPLATES

## IN-PERSON/PHONE

Hi (Name of Professor),

Thank you again for writing my (Include name of research opportunity) recommendation letter. Your support through this process means so much to me.

I am really looking forward to the possibility of doing research on (state what area of the research program that interests you). I will email you (state when you plan to provide them the information. Should be later that day or by the following day) with (state what things you will include such as the research program website link, reference/letter submission requirements and instructions, application deadline, my application materials, etc.).

# YES RESPONSE TEMPLATES - CONT'D

## FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

(Hi or Dear) (Name of Professor),

Thank you again for supporting my application to (Include name of research opportunity) by writing my letter of recommendation. I appreciate your support throughout this process. As previously mentioned (in my last email dated... or when we saw each other on...), I am including in this email information that may help you as you draft my recommendation letter:

- Program Website: (include website link)
- Reference Letter Deadline: (state when you want them to submit it)
- Instructions on how to submit your reference/recommendation letter and a direct link to where letters are received
- Tailored resume
- Draft answers to supplemental questions
- Draft personal statement
- List of qualities that (Include name of research opportunity) is looking for in a candidate, which if you can speak to any or all of the qualities and how I exhibit them, I would much appreciate it

Please let me know if you have any questions or if there is anything else I can provide you to support this process.

Best,

(Your First and Last Name)

# DECLINED RESPONSE TEMPLATES

## IN-PERSON/PHONE

While I am disappointed to hear that my application to (state name of research opportunity) will not include a recommendation letter from you, I respect your decision and still would like to thank you for your consideration. If you do have a moment to spare, I would appreciate any additional feedback that would help me improve academically and/or professionally.

## EMAIL

(Hi or Dear) (Name of Professor),

While I am disappointed to hear that my application to (state name of research opportunity) will not include a recommendation letter from you, I respect your decision and still would like to thank you for your consideration. If you do have a moment to spare, I would appreciate any additional feedback that would help me improve academically and/or professionally.

Best,

(Your First and Last Name)



# REMINDER DEADLINE TEMPLATES

## IN-PERSON/PHONE

Hi (Name of Professor),

I wanted to thank you again for offering to write my (state name of research opportunity) recommendation letter that is due on (state deadline). Your support through this process means so much to me. Before the deadline, I wanted to make sure that you have everything you need from me. If not, please let me know how I can be of assistance. I appreciate everything you have done for me.

## EMAIL

(Hi or Dear) (Name of Professor),

I hope you're doing well. Thank you again for offering to write my (state name of research opportunity) recommendation letter. I appreciate everything you have done for me. Before the deadline of (state deadline), I wanted to make sure that you have everything you need from me. Should you have any questions or require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you in advance.

Best,

(Your First and Last Name)

# RECEIVED THANK YOU TEMPLATES

## IN-PERSON/PHONE

(Hi or Dear) (Name of Professor),

I wanted to thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to write my (state name of research opportunity) recommendation letter. I received notice that your recommendation letter was received. I greatly appreciate the time and effort you put into it. I anticipate hearing back from the selection committee by (find out when the program will release decisions and state the timeline here) and will be sure to keep you updated regarding the status of my application.

## EMAIL

(Hi or Dear) (Name of Professor),

I wanted to thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to write my (state name of research opportunity) recommendation letter. According to my application status, they received your recommendation letter. I greatly appreciate the time and effort you put into it. I anticipate hearing back from the selection committee by (find out when the program will release decisions and state the timeline here) and will be sure to keep you updated regarding the status of my application.

Best,

(Your First and Last Name)

# DECISION FOLLOW-UP TEMPLATES

## OFFER RESPONSE

(Hi or Dear) (Name of Professor),

I wanted to update you on the status of my (state name of research opportunity) application. I heard back from the selection committee and I was offered a spot in the program. I have until (state acceptance deadline) to accept their offer. Thank you again for your time and for supporting me as I continue to advance academically and professionally.

Best,

(Your First and Last Name)

## DECLINED RESPONSE

(Hi or Dear) (Name of Professor),

I wanted to update you on the status of my (state name of research opportunity) application. I heard back from the selection committee and unfortunately, I was not offered a spot in the program. Although I am disappointed, I will move forward and prepare for the next opportunity. Thank you again for your time and for supporting me as I continue to advance academically and professionally.

Best,

(Your First and Last Name)