

Helpful Hints

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

At least two letters of support from faculty are usually required. All letters must be on University letterhead. One should be from the faculty advisor. Try to keep letters to one page.

Letters should avoid discipline-specific jargon and should use language that is meaningful to a University-wide faculty committee.

Emphasize the nominee's intellectual attributes and development in a way that faculty from any program can appreciate. A few brief examples may be useful to illustrate your points (e.g., moved through program at exceptional rate; intellectual maturity and development ahead of cohort; outstanding ability in analysis, synthesis, problem-solving, etc.).

Emphasize quantifiable attributes and achievements (e.g., already author/co-author of x papers, presented x papers at x inter/national society meetings, received x awards).

Emphasize other attributes that indicate maturity and/or professionalism (e.g., evidence of excellence in teaching, leadership, teamwork skills; supervised research of x undergraduates; rapid progress despite working 20-40 hours/week to support self, etc.).

Limit description of student's research to one paragraph (6-8 lines) and avoid jargon as much as possible. In layperson terms, indicate why the student's research is important.

Why, for example, should the public care? (A paragraph describing the student's identification of an enzyme of a particular tissue of a particular species via x, y and z techniques will not be meaningful to most faculty on an award committee).

A third letter of support from the Graduate Director or Chair of the department is usually helpful and sometimes expected. This letter is most useful if it puts the student's work, accomplishments, and contributions in perspective relative to all graduate students in the program.

NARRATIVE PARAGRAPH FOR PUBLIC AUDIENCE

When writing narrative paragraphs for a public audience, use programs on National Public Radio as a model for addressing innovating and complex ideas. NPR presents information and ideas in clear, concise language appropriate for its audience. In addition, NPR deliberately engages and re-engages the audience throughout the segment. A short narrative for the public about the nominee's research should be designed in the same way. Here are some tips:

Stick to the word limit

Write as if it is a spoken rather than printed abstract

Hook readers with the first sentence

Avoid jargon and words a layperson wouldn't understand

Highlight specific accomplishments

Engage the audience by indicating what's in it for them. Why should they care?

Conclude by summarizing but not repeating what has been said

STUDENT'S DOCUMENTATION

Most awards require some material from the nominee. Faculty advisors and graduate directors should review nomination requirements and materials with nominees, stressing the following:

Posted guidelines must be followed to the letter, and all deadlines must be met

The material must have a professional appearance

Curricula Vitae should be in a format appropriate for the discipline

Abstracts of research should be (re)written for a University-wide committee rather than for the discipline

Requests for letters of support must be made in a timely way (e.g., two weeks in advance); include copies of guidelines/announcement