GUIDELINES FOR RECOMMENDATION LETTER WRITERS

To Letter Writers:

We thank you for agreeing to write a letter of recommendation for an aspiring health professional. We realize that you are taking valuable time from your busy schedules to contribute. We wanted to give you some context and guidelines to help you make this task more manageable. If you have any questions please feel free to contact your student’s Health Professions Advisor, Jessica Porras at jporras@gwu.edu.

Role of the Health Professions Advisory Committee (HPAC):

The HPAC exists to provide a comprehensive committee letter of evaluation for GW students and alumni who intend to apply to medical or dental schools. The committee letter, along with individual letters of recommendation, are sent as a packet to all of the schools to which the student has applied. While the HPAC process is not mandatory, medical and dental schools place significant weight on committee letters. If an applicant elects not to use the HPAC’s services, admissions committees may want a letter of explanation from the committee, which we can provide.

Who is on the HPAC:

The committee consists of the two health professions advisors and two faculty members, one from a science department and one from a non-science department.

Criteria for a student to receive an HPAC letter of evaluation:

This letter is written on a student’s request and only after the student completes the written application by the February 19, 2016 deadline. The written application includes submission of letters of recommendation, a personal statement, supplemental information forms, and transcript(s). An interview with the HPAC follows submission of the written application. Applicants are only offered an interview if they meet the following criteria (we exercise flexibility when circumstances merit):

- A 3.2 BCPM GPA (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Math)
- The majority of the applicant’s medical or dental prerequisite coursework must be completed in residence at GW
- Applicant must meet with their Health Professions Advisor at least once during the current academic year
- Applicants must have experience in setting that involves patient and physician interaction

How your letter will be used:

Your letter of recommendation will be used for evaluation purposes by the GW Health Professions Advisor Committee (HPAC) and by health professional schools to which the student has applied. Therefore, please address your letter to “Admissions Committee” and NOT to “HPAC”. Please make every effort to compose your letter on official letterhead and include a signature. We are familiar with cases of medical schools delaying review of an application due to lack of letterhead and signature. If you
are a GW staff person and do not have access to GW letterhead, please contact us and we can provide it for you. Students waive all their rights of access to your letter and it is confidential.

Please keep in mind that HPAC members read all of the letters that are submitted and that your letter will be included in a packet along with the committee evaluation. Reusing the same or very similar letters for different students makes the recommendation less valuable and makes it harder for the committee and health professions schools to discern how a student compares to his or her peers. Given this, we kindly request that you avoid using form letters whenever possible. If you are not able to write a unique letter for a student, please consider not writing a recommendation.

**What we are looking for:**
The HPAC relies heavily on information provided by the student’s letters of recommendation. We have found that the most useful letters heed the following guidelines.

1) **Explain your relationship with the applicant**
2) **Assess the applicant’s suitability rather than advocate for the applicant**
3) **Focus on the applicant rather than details about the lab, course, assignment, job, or institution**
4) **Focus on behaviors that you have observed directly**
5) **Provide information on applicant’s personal characteristics (i.e., service orientation, social skills, cultural competence, teamwork, oral communication, ethics, reliability, resilience, adaptability, capacity for improvement)**
6) **Provide information regarding applicant’s thinking and reasoning abilities (i.e. critical thinking, quantitative reasoning, scientific inquiry, written communication)**
7) **Provide information about grades ONLY when there is context for interpreting them. Grades and GPA information are available within the application.**
8) **Provide comparative information** (be sure to provide context and rationale for the final comparison)

**Where you should send your letter:**
All letters should be addressed to Admissions Committee and should be sent to Interfolio.com. Students must give you a tracking number before you can submit your letter, either electronically or via hard copy.

Thanks again for supporting one of our students, and please contact us if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

The GW Health Professions Advisory Committee