

Letters of Recommendation Handout 2011-2012

Letters of Recommendation are an important factor in professional and graduate school applications. It is integral to think carefully about who you would ask to write a letter of recommendation (sometimes referred to as letters of evaluation or reference). Many schools will request a committee letter. This usually refers to a letter written by a committee or member of a team who evaluates and compiles information from several sources. UIC does not have a pre-health committee and such letters are not written. Most schools in Illinois and the surrounding area are aware of UIC's policy and do not require such letters of UIC students. Students may request a letter of explanation be sent to schools unfamiliar with UIC's practices as necessary.

UIC and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences offer a Letter Forwarding Service for students applying to **dental and medical schools**. Students can request professors, faculty mentors, volunteer coordinators, work supervisors, and other evaluators, write a letter of recommendation on their behalf. The letter is then forwarded to the College of LAS and kept on file for the student. When it is time to send letters to individual professional schools or central application services, students can request LAS forward a copy of the letters to such institutions. This service allows evaluators to write only one letter and have it safely stored until the student desires to apply.

The purpose of a letter of recommendation is to share information and insights regarding your character, motivations and specific abilities that others have observed. You want to think about who can write a strong letter in support of your candidacy not only academically, but also socially and emotionally. You want to choose an evaluator who can attest to your involvement in a broad spectrum of activities during your undergraduate education. Therefore, it is wise to begin to develop relationships with faculty and other individuals early.

Requesting Letters:

- Have a personal (face to face) conversation with the intended recommender.
- Questions you can ask:
 - Would you be willing to write a letter of recommendation for me?
 - Do you think you can write a strong letter of reference?
 - Can I set up another time to discuss more specifics with you and can I send you some other information that might help you write the letter?
- Be thoughtful regarding when you ask individuals to write for you and be sensitive to the time frame you have for the letters to be completed. (Ex. Asking a professor to write a letter during final exam week is probably not best, similarly asking someone to write a letter a few days before the deadline is not thoughtful either).

Suggested information or materials to provide to evaluators:

- Resume or summary of activities you have participated in
- Essay or personal statement detailing why you want to enter the professional school or profession you have chosen

Possible Content of Letter of Recommendation or Evaluation form:

- Extent of the evaluator's relationship with applicant
 - Length of time known (Ex. One semester, two years, etc)
 - Context in which the applicant is known (Ex. Student, research assistant, volunteer)
- Intellectual
 - Comparison with other students in course and evaluator's career
 - Approach and attitude toward coursework
 - Consistency of performance and problem solving and analytical skills
 - Degree of difficulty of the course
 - Research skills (if applicable)
 - Specific contribution to course
 - Teaching assistant's evaluation of abilities
- Personal characteristics
 - Interpersonal, leadership skills
 - Ability to communicate and organize thoughts, ideas
 - Ability to adapt to situation, reaction to stress and difficult circumstances
 - Motivation for the study of the particular professional area

- Emotional stability
- Ability and use of constructive criticism
- Reliability, maturity, flexibility, honesty, cooperativeness, responsibility

Professional Health Fields

- Dentistry
 - Central Application Service (AADSAS) opens June 1, 2011.
 - UIC will forward letter packet to AADSAS when file is complete. Reference instructional handout for specific instructions regarding LAS forwarding procedures.
- Allopathic Medicine
 - Central Application Service (AMCAS) opens on May 5, 2011 and students may begin submission starting in the beginning of June 2010, specific date unknown.
 - UIC will forward letter packet to AMCAS when file is complete. Reference the handout for specific instructions regarding LAS forwarding procedures.
 - Non-participating schools, a list can be found at <http://www.aamc.org/students/amcas/faq/amcasletters.htm>
 - All Illinois schools are participating.
- Osteopathic Medicine
 - Central Application Service (AACOMAS) opens May 5, 2011. Students may begin submitting their application in the beginning of June 2011.
 - UIC will forward to Virtual Evals when file is complete, reference the handout for specific instructions regarding LAS forwarding procedures. Schools can access the letter packet from this site.
- Nursing
 - Students are responsible for sending letters (if required) to individual schools
 - UIC requires two electronic letters (One from professor and the other from a work supervisor/volunteer coordinator, etc.)<http://www.uic.edu/nursing/prospectivestudents/bsn-apply.shtml>
- Nutrition
 - Students are responsible for sending letters (if required) to individual schools
 - UIC's Coordinated program requires three letters visit the application site for additional informationhttp://www.ahs.uic.edu/kn/programs/nutr/bs/bscp_apply_materials.php
- Occupational Therapy
 - Students are responsible for sending letters (if required) to individual schools.
 - UIC's program requires three letters, visit the application site for additional informationhttp://www.ahs.uic.edu/ot/programs/mscert_apply_materials.php
- Optometry
 - Central Application Service (OptomCAS) opens around July 15, 2011
 - Students must use the Electronic Letter Service provided through OptomCAS.
 - Specific Instructions for OptomCAS will be available when the application opens. The system will likely be similar to:
 - Student responsibility to list evaluators in application or have evaluator send letters to OptomCAS.
 - Highly encouraged to have evaluator submit an electronic reference
 - Student designates evaluator in application, e-mail is sent to individual directing to a secure site to complete evaluation.
 - Paper letters are accepted; student must print the Reference Form (specific to each evaluator) and have evaluator mail to OptomCAS.
- Podiatry
 - Central Application Service (AACPMAS) opens in August 2011.
 - Students are responsible for sending letters (if required) to individual schools or can contact Candice Eisenhauer about LAS sending a packet through Virtual Evals to podiatry schools.
- Pharmacy
 - Central Application Service (PharmCAS) opens in June 2011.

- Most schools prefer letters (max 4) go to PharmCAS if they are required, a few schools letters will be sent directly to individual schools
 - Illinois Schools
 - All Illinois schools (in PharmCAS) go to application service
 - Southern Illinois is not part of PharmCAS.
 - Chicago State “requires” a PH Advisor letter; you should replace this with a second professor letter, preferably science. They are aware UIC Pre-Health advising does not write letters for students.
- Student responsibility to request evaluators send letters (4 max) to PharmCAS.
 - Highly encouraged to have evaluator submit an electronic reference
 - Student designates evaluator in application, e-mail is sent to individual directing to a secure site to complete evaluation.
 - Paper letters are accepted; student must print the Reference Form (specific to each evaluator) and have evaluator mail to PharmCAS.
- Physical Therapy
 - Central Application Service (PTCAS) opens July 1, 2011.
 - Student responsibility to request evaluators send letters (4 max) to PTCAS.
 - Highly encouraged to have evaluator submit an electronic reference
 - Student designates evaluator in application, e-mail is sent to individual directing to a secure site to complete evaluation.
 - Paper letters are accepted, student must print the Reference Form (specific to each evaluator) and have evaluator mail to PTCAS
- Physician Assistant
 - Central Application Service (CASPA) opened April 14, 2011.
 - Student responsibility to request evaluators send letters (3 max) to CASPA.
 - Highly encouraged to have evaluator submit an electronic reference
 - Student designates evaluator in application, e-mail is sent to individual directing to a secure site to complete evaluation.
 - Paper letters are accepted; student must print the Reference Form (specific to each evaluator) and have evaluator mail to CASPA.
- Veterinary Medicine
 - Central Application Service (VMCAS).
 - Student responsibility to request evaluators send letters (3 min, 5 max) to VMCAS.
 - Evaluations must be submitted electronically.
 - Student designates evaluator in application, e-mail is sent to individual directing to a secure site to complete evaluation.

Notes:

- Even within the professional fields there is some variation in the types of letters required by each school. It is the students’ responsibility to research each school and be sure they have met the requirements prior to submission of the letter.
- LAS Letter Forwarding (see additional handout for more information)
 - UIC will provide a cover letter explaining your intent towards a health profession and the following letters were collected on your behalf. Students should have the evaluation form submitted by each evaluator as well.
- Normally, central services do not require Letter of Recommendation information to be finalized at the time of submission. However, once you submit the Letter of Recommendation information you cannot alter it online.
- Electronic Submissions
 - Inform your Evaluators in advance that spam blocking software may prevent or delay delivery of the evaluation request email. Alert evaluators when you submit your application so they can be looking for the email and checking their spam folder. Keep in close contact with your evaluators to ensure that they receive and are able to complete your electronic evaluation request. If they do not receive the request, follow the instructions in the application for re-submission. Each application service treats this process differently.