

## INFORMATION FOR WRITERS OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

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### I. General Recommendations

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Dear Recommender:

It is very clear that one of the most important aspects of a student's application is the quality of the references. Stanford students have been fortunate in the care that has been taken by faculty and staff when writing reference letters for such awards as Rhodes, Marshall, Mitchell, Fulbright, Gates, Luce etc. While the information in this memo is specifically aimed at scholarships to the UK and Ireland, it is very relevant to other scholarships.

We hope that the following comments will prove useful to you as you write letters of recommendation for your students. Further information on these awards can be found at

<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/icenter/orc/scholarships/scholarships.html>

#### **1. What committees look for in letters of reference**

- Specific information about the candidate and specific information on what the student has achieved.
- Information on how you know the student and for how long. The more personally you can indicate you know the student the better.
- A frame of reference for your comments, i.e. "I have taught for 15 years...". This helps to place the student in a larger context of students you have taught or worked with. If you feel comfortable placing the student in a certain percentile please do so (though to be effective it needs to be a high and selective percentile).
- Evidence that you know the student personally: tell the reader what is unusual about this student.
- Inclusion of remarks from colleagues where appropriate.
- An understanding of the purpose of the scholarship for which the reference is being requested.

#### **2. What does not impress readers of letters of reference**

- Generic, short letters that do not indicate a close relationship with the student.
- Letters that summarize what is found elsewhere in the application.

- General platitudes about the student: readers need to know exactly how a student has distinguished themselves.
- Comments that focus on activities that are some way in the past.
- Letters written by an “important or well know person” that clearly show that there is little knowledge of the student.

### **3. Tips on Formatting Letters of Recommendation**

- Address letters to the individual who chairs the fellowship committee, if that information is provided, or to the committee as a whole (“Dear Marshall Scholarship Committee”).
- Letters for major fellowships are usually 1 to 2 pages single-spaced.

### **4. Other Considerations**

- Ask your students who else is writing for them and what the other recommenders are likely to say. You can then provide information in your letters that will complement what is being written by others, so that together the letters will provide a more comprehensive picture of each applicant.
- If you are called upon to write letters for two or more applicants for the same fellowship, beware of using too much of the same language in each, especially if they will be read by the same committee (e.g., the same Rhodes State Committee or Marshall Regional Committee). If you have questions about whether two or more students are applying through the same state or region, please contact John Pearson, at [pearsonj@stanford.edu](mailto:pearsonj@stanford.edu) or (650) 725-0889.

### **5. When to decline a request for a letter of recommendation:**

- If you feel that you cannot be emphatically positive in support of a student.
- If you recall little more about a student than the recorded grades.
- If you think that you are not the best person to write a letter.
- If a student approaches you in a highly unprofessional manner.
- If you simply do not have the time or material to write a good letter for a student.

You can help the student to consider other possible letter writers, but agreeing to write for a student whom you cannot strongly support is good for no one.

Some recommenders ask me to comment on drafts of their fellowship letters; I am happy to do so via email or phone: [pearsonj@stanford.edu](mailto:pearsonj@stanford.edu) or 650-725-0889.

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## **II. RHODES/MARSHALL RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The application procedure for these awards is quite involved, and your letters of recommendation are a crucial part of each candidate's application. Both the scholarships underline just how important letters of reference are to their deliberations as to which candidates they will ask to attend interviews. Serious candidates for these awards are encouraged to contact their references early, often as early as winter quarter, to be assured that they have your support and that you have the time and necessary information in order to write a strong recommendation.

PLEASE NOTE: There are two stages to the recommendation process. The first is the "campus" stage; the second is the national (District for Rhodes; Regional for Marshall) stages. The student may need your help at both intervals. You may submit the same letter at each stage, but the address will need to be revised and only one of the scholarships should be mentioned. We do ask students to be very clear with references when and

where references are due and to provide references with any background information that could assist in the writing of a letter.

## **1. CAMPUS LEVEL APPLICATION (RHODES & MARSHALL)**

Each applicant is asked to have 3 letters of recommendation submitted to the Stanford Rhodes & Marshall Panel for the campus review. The Rhodes-Marshall Panel is composed of faculty and staff members, former Rhodes and Marshall Scholars, and graduate students who have studied in the United Kingdom. Each candidate is interviewed for 20-30 minutes.

**Applicants must receive the university's endorsement based on this campus interview in order to submit a final application for the Rhodes and/or Marshall Scholarship.**

If the candidate you are supporting is applying for both awards, you need write only one letter to the campus committee. This letter is for internal use only, so it need not be letter-perfect. Campus references do NOT get forwarded to any Rhodes District or Marshall Regional Committee. However, it DOES need to be submitted on time. Since you may be asked by the candidate you are supporting to send a letter of recommendation to a Rhodes District Committee and/or to the student to forward to the Marshall Regional Committee at a later date, please save a copy of your letter to the campus committee. (Letters to the Panel are considered confidential and are destroyed following the campus interviews).

A letter of recommendation is most useful to the reviewing committee when it includes specific evaluative comments on the candidate's suitability for a Rhodes or Marshall Scholarship. (See notes below on "Qualifications Sought,") It is also helpful for recommenders to have reviewed students' applications and to comment on them. Our experience has been that references should not just comment on the specific area of past interaction but should comment on future potential, applicability of chosen academic course of study in the U.K. and any broader knowledge you would have of the student's accomplishments and contributions.

We have chosen the latest possible campus deadline in order to complete the campus process by the national deadline. Application packets are distributed to panelists the very same day they are due by students. Therefore, it is very important that we receive all application materials including letters of recommendation, by the campus deadline. Although late letters will be accepted, we cannot guarantee that it will not have a negative effect on the candidate's application.

## **2. RHODES SCHOLARSHIP SPECIFICS**

Qualifications Sought: "Quality of both character and intellect is the most important requirement for a Rhodes Scholarship, and this is what the committees will seek. The Rhodes Scholar should not be one-sided or selfish. Intellectual ability should be founded on sound character, and integrity of character upon sound intellect. Success in being elected to office in student organizations may or may not be evidence of unself-seeking leadership. Cecil Rhodes himself evidently regarded leadership as consisting of moral courage and interest in one's contemporaries quite as much in the more aggressive qualities. It was his hope that a Rhodes Scholar would come to esteem the performance of public duties as his highest aim. Continuing physical vigor to enable a Scholar to make an effective contribution to the world is more important than athletic prowess. Nor does financial need give a special claim to a Rhodes Scholarship. Further, the Will lays down that no student shall be qualified or disqualified for election to a Scholarship on account of race or religious opinions."

### **3. RHODES NATIONAL APPLICATION**

Each applicant is asked to have 5-8 letters submitted to the Rhodes District Committee. Please use the form with the heading "Information for the person from whom a letter of appraisal has been requested." You may attach your letter of recommendation to this form. You may use your campus letter or a revision thereof, but please refer only to the Rhodes Scholarship in this letter. Recommendation letters must be RECEIVED BY the District Committee on the date designated on the reference form.

### **4. MARSHALL SCHOLARSHIP**

Qualifications Sought: "In appointing Marshall Scholars the selectors will look for distinction of intellect and character as evidenced both by their scholastic attainments and by their other activities and achievements. Preference will be given to candidates who combine high academic ability with the capacity to play an active part in the life of the United Kingdom university to which they go, and to those who display a potential to make a significant contribution to their society."

"A minimum qualification of a grade point average of 3.7 (or A-) for academic courses will normally be required; exceptions may be made only on the specific recommendation of the sponsoring college."

### **5. MARSHALL NATIONAL APPLICATION**

Marshall Scholarships are submitted online. Once the applicant passes the campus screening, you will be sent a link, username and password for the Marshall online application. It is important that you submit your letter by the national deadline. All recommendations are totally confidential.

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## **III. GATES/CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARSHIP**

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The Gates/Cambridge selection process requires two different kinds of letters. Both should emphasize the suitability of study in the selected degree program at Cambridge for this student. If you are writing a recommendation for University admission, focus on the student's academic achievement and suitability to undertake the proposed course of study. The one required recommendation for the Gates Cambridge Trust should present the broadest possible picture of the candidate including leadership potential, social commitment, and "any other factors relevant to the application. Leadership potential and a commitment to help society will be as important as outstanding academic merit in identifying and shortlisting the best candidates."

Criteria your letter should include:

- \* Exceptional achievement in academics
  - \* Evidence of potential to make a significant contribution to chosen profession
  - \* Potential to assert leadership in addressing global problems relating to learning, technology, health, and social equality (Gates Foundation's priorities).
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## **IV) MITCHELL SCHOLARSHIP (IRELAND)**

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*The Overseas Resource Center*  
*Stanford University*

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The mission of the Mitchell scholarship is “to educate future American leaders about the island of Ireland and to provide tomorrow’s leaders with an understanding about, an interest in, and an affinity with, the island from which 44 million Americans claim descent.” The US-Ireland Alliance defines a leader as anyone who is likely to be a leader in his or her field (not just politics). Mitchell Scholars are expected to be outstanding cultural ambassadors to Ireland, and it should also be clear that the applicant has the potential to perform well in his or her chosen Irish program of study, knowing that students are unlikely to find as much support, encouragement, or on-going academic feedback in an Irish university as they have at Stanford. Mitchell Scholars do a lot as a group, and because there are only twelve of them each year, a student’s ability to contribute as a member of a team is particularly important. At the same time, potential Mitchell Scholars must also be independent and able to fend for themselves, since each is likely to be one of only two awardees placed at a particular Irish university. Lastly, students with interests in Irish-European-US relationships and making people-to-people connections across borders have an advantage in the selection process. To the extent that you can comment on specific attributes of the candidate that are relevant to these considerations, please do so.

Criteria your letter should address include:

- \* Demonstrated record of intellectual distinction, leadership, and extra-curricular activity, indicating a strong potential for future leadership and contribution to society
- \* Honesty, fairness, and unselfish service to others
- \* Strong preparation for the proposed course of study

The recommender should know the candidate well, believe she or he is truly exceptional, be willing and able to write an outstanding 1 1/2 -2 page letter, and be able to testify to one or more specific experiences of outstanding accomplishment or performance by the candidate.

**Questions???**

Please feel free to call Diane Murk, Overseas Resource Center Manager at (650)723-0856 or John Pearson, Bechtel International Center Director at (650) 725-0889 if any of this is unclear, or if you have further questions. Thank you for taking the time to participate in this process.