Recommendations meeting with the student

- Set a time to meet with the student
- Take notes
- Outline your expectations (see handout)
- Set a timeline. Ask for a list of deadlines. Excel spread sheets are really helpful if you are writing several for the same student.
- Ask for reminders and for outcomes
Annotated Resume
Unofficial Transcript
Graded Papers
Paragraph descriptions of activities
Draft of proposal or personal statement
Reference guidance from award or institution
Recommendations when to say no

- You do not know the student well. This is especially important if the request is for a nationally competitive award.
- You have not worked with the student in a very long time.
- The student does not provide you with sufficient information or asks at the last minute. (See Chuck King handout.)
- You have questions about the student’s work or integrity.
- You simply do not have time.
Students should say no when faculty members ask them to draft letters for their signature or for revision.

**WHY?**
- Weak letters
- Inappropriate tone
- Awkward feelings for the student
- May make fraudulent claims
- Not appreciated by foundations
- Violates the NAFA code of ethics
Recommendations

Understand the purpose of the letter
Know the audience
Adjust the letter for different awards. Each will provide guidance.
Double-check key words like name of award, program, or institution
Connect with the student about what you should emphasize
Provide examples for general statements.
Use letterhead
Include the address if possible even on electronic submissions
Avoid Dear Sir (or Dear Sir or Madame)
Avoid To Whom it May Concern unless it is a generic letter given to the student for future use
Use Dear Admissions or ___Scholarship Selection Committee
Include a real signature if possible, an electronic one if not. Do not use a script font. Always check to make sure you make the right changes for the specific award.
Aim for at least a full page.
Recommendations

the structure of the letter

- Context of your interactions with the student
- How the student compares to others (if positive)
- Description of the student’s academic work/research. Why you are writing an enthusiastic letter. Details please.
- Penultimate paragraph: Any boilerplate about the lab, your work, the institution and why that is important in connection with the student
- Conclusion. Summing up student’s strength. Statement of support.
Recommendations on transferable skills:

- Ability to think critically
- Research skills
- Creativity
- Communication skills
- Leadership experience
- Teamwork abilities
- Ability to cope with obstacles
- Flexibility
I imagine this student would be a good candidate for the Rhodes.
The student certainly has a reputation on our campus.
Given where this student started, she is doing exceptionally well.
Of the ten students in my lab, he is in the top half.
I don’t know this student very well but . . . .
I am very good friend of this student’s mother . . . .
I have known this student since she was a child . . . .
She is very shy, but she copes with it.
He is certainly aware of his limitations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>coded language</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>good, solid, competent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>strongly, without reservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>on par with, in the top 25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Better</td>
<td>strong</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>happily, energetically, with confidence</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>compares favorably with, in the top 10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Best</td>
<td>outstanding excellent terrific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wholeheartedly, enthusiastically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in an elite group, in the top 2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendations be specific

- Compare with peers.
- Provide quantitative measures if possible—publications, presentations, GPA, scholarships, awards, other recognition
- Discuss the work you know first hand.
- Describe activities and leadership as well, but discuss these with the students. Avoid just lifting them off a resume
- Discuss teamwork abilities if you have evidence. Provide anecdotal information.
Questions?