

How to Request Letters of Recommendation for Graduate School

- **Develop strong professional relationships with your professors** while you are in school, so that by the time you graduate, several professors know you well. Some ways to develop these relationships include taking small classes, taking more than one class from a professor, contributing to class discussion, attending office hours, and doing Independent Studies. If you are an excellent student, you may also be eligible for Research Assistantships and Undergraduate Teaching Assistantships. These opportunities are described on the department website (see links under Sociology Undergraduate Program).
- **Define your professional goals**, carefully research graduate programs, and prepare applications for the programs that will help you reach your objectives. Pay special attention to GPA and GRE requirements; be sure you are fully qualified to apply to a graduate program *before* you apply.
- **Contact your professors about writing letters of recommendation at least 6-8 weeks in advance** of the final application deadline. It is preferable to ask for letters of recommendation in person. If you cannot do this, email is acceptable. In either case, remind professors of what courses you took from them, and when. Explain why you have chosen the specific program(s) you are applying to and how your choices relate to your professional goals.
- **Provide your professors with supporting materials:** (1) your resumé; (2) personal statement(s); (3) a list of the schools you are applying to and all addresses, forms, and instructions; (4) due dates for each letter; and (5) [a signed FERPA waiver form](#). Have copies of your transcript ready, in case your professors ask for it. Outstanding papers or written exams from courses can serve as additional reminders of the quality of your work; you should save papers with the instructors' comments on them and be ready to provide copies. Again, these materials should be provided to professors at least 6-8 weeks before the application deadline. (Remember that some graduate programs have earlier application deadlines for students who are seeking funding.)
- **Carefully proofread and edit your supporting materials** before giving them to your professors. They should represent *your very best work*, not a first draft. Why would someone spend time to write a letter of recommendation for a student who did not put time into the application materials? Why would a graduate program admit that person over another who submitted outstanding materials?
- **Waive your right to read letters of recommendation** if application forms provide you with this choice. Admission committees may take letters of recommendation more seriously if they know students will not be reading them.
- **Be certain you are going to apply to a program** for which you are asking professors to write letters of recommendation. If you are on the fence about going through with it, do not apply. Do not back out after professors have already written their letters.
- **Send a polite reminder to your professors** when an application deadline is approaching.
- **Always thank your professors promptly** for writing letters of recommendation. It is fine to do this by email.
- **Be sure to let your professors know whether you were admitted, and where you have decided to attend.**