Writing a Letter of Recommendation for a Student Fulbright Research Grant

Overview: One year of study or research in any of the 140 countries with a Fulbright Commission. Applicants design their own projects, in any discipline, typically to work with advisors or attend courses at foreign universities or other institutions of higher education.

Timeline: Applicants wishing to study or conduct research abroad in 2016-17 are encouraged to submit a priority application, including reference letters, by June 29. Over the summer, Illinois faculty and staff familiar with Fulbright will review submitted materials and provide feedback to candidates and recommenders. Then, a revised complete Fulbright application, including any updated reference letters, must be submitted to the National and International Scholarships Program by September 1, 2015, as Fulbright requires our campus to officially rate all applications before submitting them to the national competition. If you submitted a letter during the priority deadline and do not wish to make adjustments, then nothing else is needed for the September 1 deadline. The official campus rating committee may still ask you to clarify or to correct typological errors in your letter of reference. In that case, you will be provided direction on how to retrieve and resubmit your final letter prior to October 7, 2015. After the official campus interview and rating, the application will go through a national review and, if the student is a finalist, the application will be sent to an in-country review committee.

Guidance: Fulbright committees rate candidates on an array of specific criteria. Below is a list of related content suggestions for your letter of recommendation. These tips are based on the University of Illinois experience as one of the nation’s leading producers of student Fulbright grants.

1. Discuss the quality and feasibility of the student’s project. Does the student have the academic or professional skills necessary to complete the project in one year?
2. Will the candidate and the project help to advance the Fulbright aim of promoting mutual understanding among nations through engagement in the host community, among other activities? Does the student demonstrate interest in the potential host country?
3. Discuss the student’s academic or professional record. What are your impressions of the student’s ability to work independently?
4. If applicable, please assess the student’s proficiency in the appropriate foreign language.
5. Address the student’s personal qualifications. Is the student mature? Hardworking? Collegial? Please include information that helps convince a committee that the student is capable of living in a foreign country and able to work productively with a diverse range of people.
6. What impression will the candidate make as a citizen representing the U.S.?
7. How does the Fulbright experience fit into the student’s overall academic and career goals?