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Re: Writing a letter in support of an NSF GRFP applicant

Letters must be submitted by 8 PM EST (5 PM Ca time) on Thursday, Nov. 5, 2015

Dear Faculty:

Submission of a letter on behalf of a NSF GRFP applicant is a critical part of a successful proposal. The content of the letter must be targeted to this competition.

1). Letter Submission. Faculty will receive an email from the NSF indicating that an applicant has selected them to write a reference. You will need to follow the instructions provided to REGISTER for a special NSF ID in order to submit a letter on behalf of a student applicant. The deadline to respond is **8 PM EST (5 PM CA time), November 5, 2015**. If you already have an NSF ID and Fastlane password or registered with the GRFP an earlier year, you still need to complete this step, as the NSF GRFP uses a different registration system.

2). Letter Content. The NSF GRFP supports promising scholars, not a research project. Discussion of the student's prior research, research plans, and potential for contributions to science and broader impacts for society is important. It is critical to discuss both the **intellectual merit** and **broader impacts** of the student's research plan.

Fully half of the scoring is for Broader Impacts. The NSF asks that reference writers address broader impacts in the letter of reference. This includes the student's prior work (including outreach and community activities), future plans, individual experiences, leadership potential, etc. There are two categories of broader impacts and the student must demonstrate both: things that they did in the past; and activities they are propose to do with the GRFP as part of their training. **It is best if the student includes a brief summary of the Broader Impacts and Intellectual Merit information in an email to the faculty member.** Do neglect Intellectual Merit in your letter; however, former panelists state that the primary reason applicants fail is because of weak Broader Impacts.

3). Mentoring/Departmental Support and Research Infrastructure. It is helpful to provide specific information on mentoring available and special programs in your department and the School that will assist in preparing the applicant for a research career:

- GPS-Biomed;
- Professional development programs available through the UCI Graduate Division;

- Grant-writing workshops or courses in your program;
- NIH or other training grants and associated activities;
- School's IRB and Responsible Conduct of Research for grad students;
- ORU-related activities;
- Research infrastructure;
- Individual Development Plan (required for students in the SoBS starting fall 2015);
- Mentoring activities, workshops;
- Methods trainings or special graduate labs/research facilities;
- Student-directed or run activities;
- Responsible conduct of research (MMG 250 or ORA) trainings;
- Resources at the Graduate Division (GRC);
- Pedagogical fellows program for graduate student TAs;

The GPS-Biomed program is a flagship professional development program offered at UCI that is funded through the NIH BEST (Broadening Experience in Scientific Training) award. This program will provide training in the development of professional skills such as writing and communication, career development, and internships. The School and campus have great diversity and outreach programs. The School of Biological Sciences has the Minority Science Program that implements programs to promote diversity. The UCI DECADE program “aims to increase the number of minorities and women underrepresented in their disciplines receiving doctoral degrees at UC Irvine. Please mention relevant ORUs and research infrastructure such as training grants, research facilities (stem cells, virology, mouse facilities, etc.), and instrumentation (NMR, mass spec, DNA/RNA Sequence, Computation, Brain Imaging, etc.) in letters of reference.

4). Guidelines:

- Letters are limited to 2 pages
- Letters should be written using standard 8.5" × 11" page size, 12-point, Times New Roman font or Computer Modern (LaTeX) font, and 1" margins on all sides
- Letters must be single-spaced or greater – character spacing should use normal (100%) single-line space option
- Letters must be submitted on professional letterhead
- Letters must be signed

Additional letter-writing tips are available on the NSF website --

https://www.fastlane.nsf.gov/NSFHelp/flashhelp/fastlane/FastLane_Help/grfp_faqs_reference_writers.htm

Sincerely,



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