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September 30, 2014

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

DEADLINE for submission is 8 PM EST (5 PM Ca time), November 6, 2014

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 particular competition. The NSF requires your letter be **ON LETTERHEAD**, and **TWO PAGES MAXIMUM**. Your letter should include your name and title, department, and institution or organization.

1). Letter Submission. Faculty will first receive an email from the NSF indicating that an applicant has selected them to write a reference. You will need to follow the instructions therein 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 6, 2014**. 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 is looking to support a promising individual, 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. It is helpful to provide specific information on mentoring available and special programs in your department and the School (e.g., grant-writing workshops, NIH or other training grants, the School's IRB and Responsible Conduct of Research workshops for grad students, ORU-related activities or other research infrastructure that will assist in preparing your student for a research career).

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 (community service, etc.), 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.** This

does not mean that it is okay to neglect Intellectual Merit; however, former panelists state that the primary reason applicants fail to is because of a weak Broader Impacts.

3). Mentoring/Departmental Support and Research Infrastructure. Mention any relevant research infrastructure in proposals/letters of reference. Discuss mentoring plans - if your department has a regular mentoring framework, or workshops or methods trainings, student-directed or run activities; etc., mention them as part of a mentoring plan. Mention UCI-wide "responsible conduct of research (MMG 250)" trainings, Graduate Division (GRC), pedagogical training for graduate student TAs, and other institutional commitment to graduate students. Prof. Fruman has been awarded the NIH BEST (Broadening Experience in Scientific Training) award, and 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. To accomplish this, the Graduate Division and UCI ADVANCE have partnered to deliver a multifaceted program that features involvement of faculty, students and administration, and fosters collaborative efforts between faculty and graduate students in working to improve climate, access and inclusion."

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, etc.) in letters of reference.

4). Guidelines:

- Letters are limited to 2 pages
- Letters should be written using standard 8.5" x 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 should be submitted on professional letterhead
- Letters should 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,



R. Michael Mulligan, Professor and Associate Dean for Graduate Studies, School of Biological Sciences