Appendix E

Features of a Good Letter of Recommendation

1. General

A good recommendation should:
1. be written in English
2. be written by someone who knows your recent academic or professional work well (preferably a professor who has taught you or a supervisor for whom you have worked), regardless of whether the recommender has a high position.
3. be written on letterhead (university or your office)

2. Specific

In a good recommendation, the recommender should:
1. explain for what length of time and in what capacity he has known you.
2. discuss at length the quality of work you did for him.
3. be specific about your talents and strengths.
4. compare you with others of the same age and position in a named reference group (e.g., "other sub-section chiefs under my supervision in the Directorate General of Taxation...")
5. evaluate you according to personal characteristics such as organizational ability, commitment to public service, motivation, ability to work with others, emotional maturity. Sense of humor, potential for leadership, and any other qualities on which the recommender feels capable of commenting.
6. note any unusual circumstances (such as adverse family circumstances which you overcame) which show perseverance, motivation, or other qualities, or which provide other information which may be of use to the admissions committee in evaluating your application.
7. be as favorable as possible to you without stretching the truth. (Most recommendations are "inflated" and admissions committee members may have serious concerns if your ratings are only "fair" or "average"
8. list his or her professional position and address.
9. not make exaggerated, sweeping statements which are likely to endanger the recommender's own credibility (e.g., if the recommender is not familiar with American Universities, he should not make statements such as, "I am confident that the applicant will excel in any American graduate program.")
10. be written on the letterhead.
To the Committee on Admissions:

It is with great confidence that I write this letter of recommendation on behalf of David [name not provided].

In my capacity as Senior Associate at Temple, Barker & Sloane Inc. (TBS), a highly respected management and economic consulting firm, I have supervised David's work directly since he joined us in June, 1980. It is appropriate in this letter of recommendation to review David’s contributions to our staff, conclusions regarding his ability to excel both in the demanding [name of university] program and as a member of the public policy community after graduation. Implied in this review is a comparison of David’s performance relative to the many talented researchers who have been members of our staff over the last eleven years.

David graduated from MIT in June 1980 with a joint degree in civil engineering and urban planning and with a solid theoretical foundation in environmental planning. While at MIT he recognized the relationships between his undergraduate course work and real world issues, and sought to apply his formal knowledge to specific environmental problems by joining TBS’s Environment Group as a Research Assistant.

Since the first day of his tenure with us, David has demonstrated an exceptional ability to grasp the rigorous demands of the job. A Research Assistant at TBS must exhibit initiative, drive and motivation; plan and structure tasks in a well-organized, timely way; conduct thorough, deep and productive fact finding using sophisticated tools; organize large bodies of data; and present quantitative and qualitative results accurately and effectively. David has carried out these responsibilities without fault. Indicative of his success is his recent promotion to Research Associate just 18 months after joining us, a progression clearly recognized as “fast track” at TBS.

Beyond the complex policy and economic analysis that David has performed for our clients at the Environmental Protection Agency in Washington D.C., he has set a new standard of excellence among the research staff in other areas. David has emphasized the pragmatic relationships between legal policy, other social systems, economic incentives and barriers, and the human response. He articulated his findings fluently in both the written and oral form and has explored areas of interest with the appropriate level of independence.
Among David's strongest attributes is his ability to engender a sense of community among those who work with him at all levels of organization. David participates in and encourages a free-flowing, educational, constructive exchange of information that benefits all who work in our collaborative environment.

I am confident that David will bring to your school of ______ a mature, intelligent, focused professionalism that will be an asset to you and your students during the program.

Sincerely,

Senior Associate
To the Committee on Admissions:

_______ was a student in the Department of Economics at the University of Indonesia from January 1975 until his graduation in January 1981, at which time he was granted a Doctorandus Degree in Economics. During the period in which ______ was a student, I served as Head of the Department of Economics and as a lecturer. Over four years, I had the opportunity to observe ____ and feel that I can give an accurate recommendation with regard to his capability and character. I am pleased to have the opportunity to do so in this letter.

______ was among the top graduates of his class in the Department of Economics, graduating fifth from ninety students. As a result of his academic performance, he was granted a scholarship by the Department of Education. These achievements are not surprising in light of ______ intelligence and willingness to apply himself diligently in order to reach the objective which he has set for himself.

During his time at the university, ______ gained a solid foundation in economic theory as well as a working knowledge of computers. His special areas of study within the field were monetary policy and applied economics. His thesis topic, in concordance with his professional interests, concerned the impact of monetary expansion on the process of development. In this work, he clearly demonstrated that he is capable of applying theoretical knowledge to the more concrete and complex considerations of a practical problem. One of ______ strongest points is his natural ability in areas of problem solving and analysis. His approach is comprehensive in scope as he takes the time to consider a problem from a variety of perspectives prior to arriving at a conclusion. Additionally he is an active learner who seeks out knowledge actively rather than waiting for it to come to him.

In addition to a fine academic record, ______ was involved in student affairs, participating in the student senate for two years as well as attending a leadership seminar. These activities provided a forum within which he could cultivate his existing skill in both leading and working effectively with others.

In summary, ______ seems well-suited to study in a graduate program abroad. He has not only the capability, but also the motivation to succeed and the flexibility required to perform well in a foreign educational environment. Consequently, I feel that he would be an asset to your program and I recommend to you in the highest terms.

Sincerely,

Title

Department

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