LSA OFFICE OF NATIONAL SCHOLARSHIPS AND FELLOWSHIPS
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Henry Dyson, Director

Advice for Goldwater Letters of Recommendation

Thank you for taking the time to write a letter of recommendation for the Goldwater Scholarship. The quality of a candidate's letters are a very important factor in whether or not s/he is selected as one of U-M nominees and wins a scholarship in the national competition. Below are some features of strong letters that the U-M Goldwater Committee has seen over the years.

Establish Context, Personal Knowledge, and Sincerity
Goldwater letters typically come from science course instructors or research supervisors. State the context in which you know the student and establish that you have specific, personal knowledge of the student's performance and career aspirations. Whenever possible, include concrete stories about your professional interactions with the student. These are the most effective means of conveying a sense of personal knowledge and sincerity in your recommendation and can be very powerful with readers. If you think that you don't have enough personal knowledge about the student's background and career aspirations - which is quite common for instructors of large science courses - the candidate should provide a copy of her/his application and set up an appointment to discuss these items with you.

Future Research Potential
The mission of the Goldwater Scholarship is to promote future research scientists in STEM fields. Provide information that supports the candidate's sincere commitment to and aptitude for research. State the likelihood that this candidate will make significant contributions to the field. The most successful letters cite current examples of the students work as evidence of aptitude, ability, and commitment that will carry the student forward into a significant research career. One effective way of projecting the student into this future trajectory is by comparing the student favorably to other undergraduates, graduate students, or post-doc you've known you have gone on to successful graduate and professional careers.

Make the Case for Excellence
Goldwater candidates typically have a 3.9 or better GPA, have made significant contributions to research, are considered the very best in their departments or cohorts, and have strong potential for graduate school and future careers. The purpose of the letter is to explain why you think this candidate fits that profile. Be specific about the qualities that impress you (intelligence, understanding, insightfulness, speed, commitment, ability to work independently, technical skills, communication skills, teamwork and personality, etc.) Back up your comments with specific examples or anecdotes about your professional interactions with the student whenever possible.

Explicit Comparisons
At some point in the letter, typically in the first or final paragraphs, you should be explicit about the scale against which you are comparing the applicant. Obviously you will want to select the best scale against which you can favorably compare the applicant with integrity. Examples might include: "The best undergraduate in our department," "One of the best students I've encountered in 20 years of teaching at U-M [and other peer institutions]," "Compares favorably with previous Goldwater [or comparable

scholarships] winners for whom I've written letters." If you've assigned the student an A+ in your course, you may want to say something about what that distinction means (e.g. if only one A+ assigned in the course).

Submission Instructions
We only upload letters to the Goldwater Foundation for our four selected nominees. Please save your letter as, "STUDENTFIRSTNAME_STUDENTLAST_RECOMMENDERLAST," and send it directly to onsf.applications@umich.edu with "Goldwater Recommendation" in the subject line by **the first Monday of December by 12 noon**. If the applicant is nominated, we will be in touch with further instructions.

If you have any questions or concerns about your letter; or feel that you may not be the best letter writer for this candidate and would like to discuss the matter confidentially, please feel free to contact Henry Dyson directly at hdyson@umich.edu.