

Henry Dyson, Director

Advice for Marshall Letters of Recommendations

Thank you for agreeing to write a Marshall letter for our student. This is a time-consuming task and we greatly appreciate your efforts. This document provides guidelines to effective Marshall letters based on the U-M nominating committee's collective experience of reviewing dozens of nominees each year. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Henry Dyson, Director of the Office of National Scholarships and Fellowships, at hdyson@umich.edu. The deadline for U-M applications and letters is the **fourth Monday of August**.

The Importance of Recommendations

Marshall Scholarships allow future American leaders in various fields to pursue 1-2 years of postgraduate study in the UK. Roughly 1,000 candidates are nominated by their institutions each year for approximately 40 scholarships. Most applicants will have exemplary academic records and extracurricular activities. What really sets Marshall Scholars apart from the rest is the quality of their letters of recommendation. It is of vital importance, therefore, that your letter be clear, detailed, well-written, and of a reasonable length. ***The Marshall Scholarship's online portal has a strict 1,000-word limit.*** The most successful letters use this space to explain and illustrate how the candidate matches the Marshall Scholarship's three selection criteria.

The Marshall Selection Criteria

Marshall Scholars are selected for [academic merit](#), [leadership potential](#), and [ambassadorial potential](#). Detailed explanations of these three criteria provided by the Marshall Commission can be found via the links above. To the degree that you are able, you should speak directly to the candidate's qualifications in each of these areas based on your direct observations and other information provided by the candidate. However, it is likely that the candidate has asked you to write as a recommender for one of these criteria in greater detail. Your letter need not emphasize all three criteria equally.

Establish Context, Personal Knowledge, and Sincerity

State up front the context in which you know the candidate and establish that you have specific, personal knowledge of the student's performance and career aspirations. Whenever possible, include concrete stories about your academic or 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. In asking for a letter, the candidate should provide you with a copy of her/his transcript, resume, selected UK graduate program(s), and some idea of the role your letter will play in her/his overall application package. Please do not take affront if the candidate is unusually frank about this; we have helped them select specific letter writers that will collectively represent each of the high points of their applications. If you are unable to give specific examples of a candidate's personal or academic qualifications for the scholarship, we recommend that you make this clear to the candidate and, if necessary, decline to write a letter of recommendation.



Make the Case for Academic Excellence

Marshall candidates typically have > 3.8 GPA, are considered the very best in their departments or cohorts, and have strong potential for top graduate schools in their field. If you are an academic letter writer, the purpose of your letter is to explain why you think this candidate fits that profile. If you've assigned the student an A+ in your course, you may want to say something about what that distinction means. In research or term papers, 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.). Minimize general praise of the candidate's generic qualities (e.g. "the candidate is a highly motivated and hardworking") in favor of qualities that make the applicant truly exceptional even among other highly motivated and hard-working peers. Be sure to avoid [implicit bias](#) in your selection of terms. Explain why the candidate will excel in her/his selected UK graduate program. If you have specific knowledge of this field, explain why the UK fit is a particularly good choice for this candidate.

Future Leadership Potential and Commitment to the Good of Others

State the likelihood that this candidate will make significant contributions to her/his chosen field. Tell stories that emphasize the candidate's initiative, creativity and insight, problem-solving, ability to create shared vision, management of workflow and deadlines, management of team members, self-awareness and promotion of diversity, resilience, and ability to deliver results. Talk about the candidate's motivations, especially as these relate to service to others or the public good. Is the candidate driven by a particular cause, problem, or commitment to work with those who are disadvantaged or disenfranchised? What specific examples have you observed of these motivations in your interactions with the candidate? Once you've established based on past experience that the candidate possesses these traits, project them into the future. Where does the candidate's trajectory lead in 10 or 20 years?

Explicit Comparisons

One effective way of supporting these claims is by comparing the student favorably to other students, interns, employees, or peers you know who have also gone on to make significant contributions in the same field. Because letters of recommendation are inherently evaluative, at some point - 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 (e.g. "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 Marshall [or comparable scholarships] recipients for whom I've written letters.")

Submission Instructions

Your letter should be submitted via the Marshall application platform in Embark no later than **the first Monday of August**. You should receive an automated email inviting you to upload the letter when the candidate enters you into the online application. Your letter will be treated as confidential and will not be released to the student without your permission. If the committee has any suggestions for changes to the letter it is possible to un-submit it for future editing.