**READ THIS BEFORE REQUESTING A LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION FROM ME**

Melanie Manion, Vor Broker Family Professor of Political Science, Duke University

* **Remind me of the semester, year, and course you took with me and your grade in the course.**

Do not ask me to write a letter for you unless you have taken a course with me and completed a term paper or some other writing assignment in the course. I make an exception for graduate students who have worked as teaching or research assistants for me. For undergraduate students, do not ask unless you received a grade of at least B+ for both a writing assignment and the course. For graduate students, do not ask unless grades are at least A-. I may make an exception for students who have audited my classes and completed written work.

* **Remind me if I have already written a letter of recommendation for you.**

If so, tell me in which year. I keep electronic copies, filed by year, of recommendation letters I write. It is much easier to update an existing letter than to write one anew.

* **Describe the purpose of the letter clearly in your request.**

Provide a link to the relevant site, if one exists—but, more important, tell me what I need to know from your reading of the site. I am not going to spend time scrolling through a site.

* **Provide as much lead time as possible.**

It takes time to write a letter of recommendation that will be helpful to you. I have many time-sensitive professional obligations. At some times in the semester, it may be impossible for me to set aside time to write a letter for you.

* **Provide me with electronic copy of sufficient materials to write a good letter.**

Regardless of the purpose of the letter, provide: an unofficial transcript, a resume, your application essay or statement of purpose, and a term paper from the course you took with me with my evaluation of it. If the letter is for graduate study and GREs are required, provide those scores for me. If you are not a native English speaker and TOEFL is required, provide that score for me. In addition, remind me of anything distinctive that reflects *well* on you that might help me remember you.

* **Visibly waive your rights to see the letter.**

As is common practice in the academic world, I will not write a letter for you unless you waive your rights. Rest assured: I do not agree to write unless I know I can write a strong letter of support. More to the point, only a confidential letter is taken seriously—whether the letter is written to support further study or employment in the public, non-profit, or private sector, or for any other purpose.

* **Use Interfolio if possible.**

I know some institutions do not accept Interfolio letters, but everything that saves me time is helpful.

* **On all forms that accompany the recommendation, complete all requested contact information about yourself and about me.**

I will not do this. My title is Vor Broker Family Professor of Political Science. My postal address is Department of Political Science, Duke University, 140 Science Drive, Box 90204, 294F Gross Hall, Durham, NC 27708. My office telephone number is 919.660.5951—but know that I am often not in my office. My email address is [melanie.manion@duke.edu](mailto:melanie.manion@duke.edu). In the rare case that a hard copy of the letter is required, provide a stamped addressed envelope.

* **Send me a reminder three days before the deadline.**

I schedule my professional obligations, but urgent issues sometimes crowd out scheduled items. I normally don’t miss deadlines—but I appreciate a reminder. I do not consider it an annoyance.