Extracting a **good** letter of evaluation from faculty

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McMurry University
TAAHP 2019
Extracting a *good* letter of evaluation from faculty

**Where did I start?**

- I followed previous TAAHP speakers advice who illuminated the critical areas (intangibles) considered important by our Texas Health Professional Schools, and ...  
- I downloaded the AAMC website “Guidelines for Letters of Evaluation” section
Extracting a *good letter* of evaluation from faculty

**Then what?**

I created a **Composite Letter of Evaluation** that Admission Committee members could depend upon for a true evaluation and assessment of a student’s suitability for the intended profession.
Perfect!

As the Pre-Health Advisor, I understand the proper response to a request for a letter of evaluation but...

Or

Was it???

...faculty did not understand its relevance or my expectations.
Faculty need to understand everything that you are asking of them, so ...

... help them understand.
The following was my presentation to faculty:
If admittance was just based on grades..... I wouldn’t need a faculty letter.

If admittance was just based on MCAT scores..... I wouldn’t need a faculty letter.
It is the *intangibles* that can be manipulated (or NOT) that often determines the success of a future health care professional.

How well does your student measure up?
Admissions officers rated letters of evaluation (NOT letters of recommendation) the third highest data source in determining whom to interview. Most professional schools require applicants to submit undergraduate school composite letters that summarize an institution’s evaluation of an applicant.

The composite letters of evaluation are valued as they provide an integrated and institutional perspective on an applicants’ readiness for professional school.
Faculty are often confused about the difference between a *letter of recommendation* and a *letter of evaluation*. 
Faculty.....many of your students ask for a letter of recommendation, (i.e. you are playing the role as an advocate for the student),

but rarely,

do you have students ask for a letter of evaluation that provides an accurate assessment of their suitability for professional school.
Missing from most institutional composite letters has been the lack of instruction or guidance about what information is needed by the admissions officers.

When I solicit letters from you, I am compiling this information into a composite letter of evaluation for the professional school.
Professional schools do not expect **any one single evaluation** to provide information about every characteristic of an applicant.

No **one** letter writer knows everything about an applicant, but multiple letters, combined together, should reveal the applicant’s personal competencies and suitability for professional school.
This is the letter of evaluation form that you will receive from me....
Applicant name: John Q. Doe
AAMC/TMDSAS PIN: 12345

Application to:  
- [ ] Medical School
- [x] Dental School
- [ ] Other (________________________)

The student (  [ ] waived  [x] retained ) rights to see the application letter.

1. What is the basis of your interaction with this student? (check all that apply)
   - [ ] Instructor in one or more lecture or lab classes
   - [ ] Academic advisor
   - [ ] Supervision of undergraduate research
   - [ ] Other interactions (described in “Remarks”)
2. Please rate this in comparison with other students who are applying (or have applied in the past) to similar professional schools for each of the qualities listed below by marking in the appropriate box. If you have not had significant interaction with this student, please indicate and return this form to the Pre-Health Professions Advisor.

RANKINGS:
- **E**: Excellent Professional School Applicant (Highest 10% of applicants)
- **G**: Good Professional School Applicant (Upper 25% of applicants)
- **A**: Average Professional School Applicant (Middle 38% of applicants)
- **B**: Below average as Professional School Applicant (Lower 17%)
- **Q**: Questionable as Professional School Applicant
- **U**: Unsatisfactory
- **II**: Insufficient information for forming judgment

<table>
<thead>
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<td>Personal attributes (communication skills, interpersonal skills, and social skills)</td>
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3. Given proper medical/dental training, would this student be acceptable to you as a health care provider?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

4. How strongly do you support this student's application (check one)

- Very strongly support (Highest 10%)
- Strongly support (Upper 25%)
- Support (Middle 38%)
- Ambivalent (Lower 17%)
- Cannot support
The last section is the narrative of the composite letter form:

5. Narrative Remarks/Comments: (please reference the above traits in your narrative remark / comment)

Using your table rankings*, I ask that you provide narrative comments on the applicant’s strengths and weaknesses.

I offer the following guidelines to help assist you in writing your student evaluation narrative...
GUIDELINES

- Quality is more important rather than letter length. Focus on the applicant rather than details about the lab, course, or the assignment. Good or bad!

Remember that this is a combined evaluation of the applicant, and if a student has flaws, those are valid points to include.
GUIDELINES

- Do NOT include information on grades. They are available within the application. Include scores ONLY IF you are providing context to help interpret them.

- Focus on behaviors that you have observed directly when describing applicant’s suitability for professional school. Once again, **Good or bad!**

- Comparisons are appreciated and helpful. If you make comparisons, include information about the comparison group, students in a class, co-workers, etc.
To help you get started, I am providing the following prompts (please feel free to use any and/or all of them in your narrative; remember the admissions committees want to make an informed decision, so they want to see the good, the bad, and the ugly):

**NARRATIVE:**

- Thinking & Reasoning Competencies
- Science Competencies
- Interpersonal Competencies
- Intrapersonal Competencies
NARRATIVE:

Describe how the applicant has, or has NOT demonstrated any of the following competencies that are necessary for success in professional school.

- **Thinking & Reasoning Competencies**
  - **Critical Thinking**: Uses logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions, or approaches to problems
  - **Quantitative Reasoning**: Applies quantitative reasoning and appropriate mathematics to describe or explain phenomena in the natural world
  - **Scientific Inquiry**: Applies knowledge of the scientific process to integrate and synthesize information, solve problems, and formulate research questions and hypotheses
  - **Written Communication**: Effectively conveying information to others using written words and sentences
  - **Ability to ask questions that extend knowledge or application**
NARRATIVE:

Describe how the applicant has, or has NOT demonstrated any of the following competencies that are necessary for success in professional school.

- **Thinking & Reasoning Competencies**

- **Science Competencies**
  - **Living Systems**: Applies knowledge and skill in the natural sciences to solve problems related to molecular and macro systems
  
  - **Human Behavior**: Applies knowledge of the self, others, and social systems to solve problems related to psychological, social, and biological factors that influence health and well-being
NARRATIVE:

Describe how the applicant has, or has NOT demonstrated any of the following competencies that are necessary for success in professional school.

- Thinking & Reasoning Competencies
- Science Competencies
- **Interpersonal Competencies**
  - **Service Orientation**: Demonstrates a desire to help others and sensitivity to others’ needs and feelings; recognizes and acts on his/her responsibilities to society, locally nationally, and globally
  - **Social Skills**: Demonstrates awareness of others’ needs, goals, and feelings, and adjusts behaviors in response to these clues; an treats others with respect
  - **Cultural Competence**: Demonstrates knowledge of social and cultural factors that affect interactions and behaviors; shows an appreciation and respect for multiple dimensions of diversity; interacts effectively with people from diverse backgrounds
  - **Teamwork**: Works collaboratively with others to achieve shared goals; shares information & knowledge with others; puts team goals ahead of individual goals
  - **Oral Communication**: Effectively conveys information to others using spoken words and sentences; listens effectively; adjusts approach and or clarifies information as needed
NARRATIVE:

Describe how the applicant has, or has NOT demonstrated any of the following competencies that are necessary for success in professional school.

- Thinking & Reasoning Competencies
- Science Competencies
- Interpersonal Competencies
- Intrapersonal Competencies
  - Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others: Behaves in an honest and ethical manner; develops academic and personal integrity; follows rules and procedures; resists peer pressure to engage in unethical behavior
  - Reliability and Dependability: Consistently fulfills obligations in a timely manner; takes responsibility for personal actions and performance
  - Resilience and Adaptability: Demonstrates tolerance of stressful or changing environments or situations and adapts effectively to them; recovers from setbacks
  - Capacity for Improvement: Sets goals for continuous improvement and for learning new concepts and skills; solicits and responds appropriately to feedback
After I receive everyone’s individual letters of evaluation, I combine them into a composite form...

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**MCMURRY UNIVERSITY - ABILENE, TEXAS**

**EVALUATION OF PRE-HEALTH PROFESSIONS APPLICANT**

Applicant name: John Q. Doe

TMDSAS PIN: 12345

Application to:  
- [X] Medical School  
- ___ Dental School  
- ___ Other (__________________________)

The student  
- [X] waived  
- [ ] retained rights to see the application letter.

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3. Given proper medical/dental training, would this student be acceptable to you as a health care provider?  
- [ ] Yes  
- [X] No

4. How strongly do you support this candidate’s application (check one)  
- [ ] Very strongly support  
- [ ] Strongly support  
- [ ] Support  
- [ ] Ambivalent  
- [ ] Cannot support

5. REMARKS     Five of the six faculty responding provided the comments found below.
Faculty...your rankings are combined and applied to a 5 pt. scale that is shown on the composite form...

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3. Given proper medical/dental training, would this student be acceptable to you as a health care provider?  
   - Yes 6
   - No 0

4. How strongly do you support this candidate’s application (check one)  
   - Very strongly support 3
   - Strongly support 2
   - Support 1
   - Ambivalent
   - Cannot support

5. REMARKS  Five of the six faculty responding provided the comments found below.
Then I attach everyone’s unedited narratives, creating a complete composite evaluation form.
Without your participation, this composite letter would not be possible!

THANK YOU!