

## Reference Protocol and Courtesy

- **Never list or mention anyone you haven't asked**, or anyone who has not agreed to serve as a reference for you. Although some people may not mind being listed unbeknownst, it's best to play it safe and ask.
- **Always give your references a heads up** if you anticipate or are aware that an employer or school might be contacting them soon.
- **Always request letters of recommendation at least 4 or 5 weeks in advance.** Don't confuse this advice with a begin date for your graduate school pursuit – that should be done at least 18 months in advance, and you should begin to cultivate your faculty advisers as references that far in advance.
- **Cultivate your references.** That means not only choosing these folks carefully, but staying in touch over the years and having a good idea what they'll say when a potential employer or school calls them. Keep them up-to-date on your activities and progress. Don't wait until a year or two passes to ask them if they'd be willing to serve as a reference. Begin to cultivate that relationship when you are most present in their minds (e.g., when you're still in school, not years later).
- **Don't include references on your resume.** Furnish them only when requested by a potential employer. When they are requested, provide them in a separate document unless the application instructions suggest otherwise.
- **Provide your recommenders with information that might help them in writing a letter or responding to a call.** Include information about what you have been doing that uniquely qualifies you for the position or the program to which you are applying. Include your own (draft or final) statement of purpose (sometimes called personal statement) or letter of interest.
- **Consider how to best approach the person you are asking.** (e.g., Is email appropriate? A written note that indicates you will follow up to see if the person has a chance to meet to discuss your aspirations? A phone request?) Also consider other strategies that respect the person's time and style, and make sure to give him or her the chance to reflect on your request.
- **Think strategically.** Mentioning a reference's name in your cover letter, for example, may carry weight if that person is known by or connected to the organization to which you're applying. As mentioned above, make sure you have permission from your reference.
- **Respect your references' time commitment.** Write them a hard copy thank you note, verbally express your gratitude, AND keep them informed of your achievements.

