**Recommendation Letters from Dr. Sullivan**   
**Instructions for Students**

I am very happy to write letters of recommendation for students who have done well in my classes or who have been reliable research assistants.

Before I can write a good letter for you, I need you to provide me with as much information as possible so that my letter can be informed and specific. A vague letter of endorsement will not be viewed as a positive addition to your application by admissions committees or employers. Writing recommendation letters is a time-consuming process. For example, I would spend at least two hours drafting an initial letter for a student applying to graduate school. I get many requests for letters each year, but it is an important service for students and I take it very seriously. Please don't ask me to put the work into writing a letter before you have done the work of putting together the information and writing your personal statement.

I need a copy of the information requested below ***at least three weeks*** before your letter is "due."

**Guidelines:**

1.  You generally should only ask me to write you a letter if you have made an A in one of my classes or you have worked for me as a research assistant.  In some cases I might be able to write a good letter for a student who has gotten less than an A- in one of my classes, but generally this level of performance wouldn't allow me to make a strong endorsement of your academic potential.

2.  My strong recommendation is that you waive your right to inspect your files and your letters because, if you don't waive this right, graduate schools will probably not take the letter seriously and it may look like you have something to "hide."  If you can't trust what I have to say about you then I am probably not the right person to be writing the letter for you.

4.  Writing the personal statement is the most difficult part of the process of applying for graduate school.  There are many websites and books available with advice and guidelines on how to get started.  I will be happy to give you feedback on your personal statement if you get it to me at least a month before your first deadline.  One bit of advice: be sure to talk about your specific experiences that are relevant for that program, why you are applying to that **specific** program, and what your goals are to do with your degree.  You need to do your homework on the programs to which you are applying.  It needs to sound like a professional statement of background and goals, and not like a "diary entry."  Most graduate school admissions committees are looking for specific information and clear goals in the essay.

5.  If you are using me as a reference for a job or are applying to programs that do not require a personal statement, I still need you to write out a description of your career goals, what type of job you hope to get, etc. Most jobs or internships will require a cover letter or a specific application, please give me a copy of these.

3.  Put all of this information together at least three weeks before the first deadline.  Feel free to talk to me if you have questions or are unsure about any part of it, but the earlier you get started on this, the better. Contact the career services office if you are unsure of how to create a vita or resume, how to write a personal statement, etc.

6. You are not required to meet with me about your application, but you must bring/mail hard copies of the materials I need to my office unless you have made other arrangements with me.

**Information needed (at least three weeks before the first deadline):**

 \_\_\_\_\_  Your resume.  Be sure to include information on research experiences, extracurricular activities, or anything else that you think would be relevant for me to mention in your letter.

 \_\_\_\_\_  Your personal statement/ cover letter (the essay in which you outline your goals and reasons for applying to graduate school or for a particular scholarship, job, internship, etc…). This is not optional.

 \_\_\_\_\_  a copy of your transcripts (unofficial is fine) with the courses you took with me highlighted

\_\_\_\_\_ A signed copy of the consent form at <http://registrar.unc.edu/training/ferpa/ferpa-documents/> authorizing me to release academic information (e.g., your grade in my class and performance on major assignments) in a letter of recommendation. FERPA restricts the kinds of information that can be provided about a student. Therefore, students who request a letter of reference or a telephone reference from a faculty or staff member must authorize the release of information from their education records.

 \_\_\_\_\_  If I need to send multiple letters, make me a list of all the schools (or employers/ scholarship providers) to which I will send a letter, including application deadlines and contact information.  Organize the list chronologically, by the date on which the letter is due.  Please be sure to list the precise degree you are seeking, and give me the exact name of the department (e.g., seeking a Ph.D. in Political Science from the Department of Political Science; seeking a M.A. in International Affairs from the Department of International Affairs).

\_\_\_\_\_ If you are applying to anything other than a standard graduate/law program, please provide me with some material describing the particular scholarship/program/ internship so that I know what I am recommending you for.

 \_\_\_\_\_ Recommendation forms for the schools/programs that provide them.  Fill in my name and all of my information on the forms (neatly).

 Complete all information on the form, including my name, address, etc:

Patricia Lynne Sullivan, Ph.D.

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Helpful sites for additional information:

<http://www.top-law-schools.com/letters-of-recommendation.html>

<http://www.socialpsychology.org/rectips.htm>

http://homes.cs.washington.edu/~mernst/advice/request-recommendation.html