Writing Recommendations for the Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship

Thank you for agreeing to complete a recommendation form for an English Teaching Assistantship (ETA) Fulbright applicant. Please provide your assessment via the Fulbright website. You will receive an automated message from Fulbright using their “Embark” system with instructions on how to do so when the applicant enters your contact information. Recommendations are only submitted online, with no hardcopy needed.

Overview:
Fulbright ETAs serve under supervision at assigned placements and are expected to develop and carry out a variety of learning activities, make presentations on U.S. culture and society, and generally assist faculty in an English language department. ETAs are not responsible for designing curricula or teaching full courses. As a secondary component of the grant, many countries request applicants to describe another project or activity that they would pursue concurrent with the ETA assignment.

Campus Process:
Students and recommenders are encouraged, but not required, to submit materials by the June 29, 2017 priority deadline. Ad-hoc campus scholarship committees informally will review priority Fulbright applications over the summer and provide feedback to applicants. In addition, the committee may ask referees to clarify or to correct typographical errors. Student applications (including any revised online references) are officially due to the National and International Scholarships Program on August 30, 2017. A campus committee will then officially review the submission, interview the candidate, and rate the application. The official campus rating committee may also ask you to consider making adjustments to your reference. In that case, you will be provided direction on how to retrieve and resubmit your final comments prior to September 28, 2017, when the student must submit her/his final application to the Fulbright national screening committee.

Recommendation Form:
Fulbright requires references to fill out a specific form for English Teaching Assistantship grants, rather than a general letter of recommendation. Here is a summary of the questions and approximation of comment space:

1. In what context and for how long you have known the candidate? (120 words)
2. How proficient is the candidate in speaking and writing clearly in English? (120 words)
3. Does the applicant exhibit a penchant for teaching or mentoring? (70 words)
4. Please comment on the candidate’s abilities to succeed in an unstructured situation. (70 words)
5. How might the applicant manage living in a different cultural environment? Would the applicant make a strong cultural ambassador for the US? (70 words)
6. Why else might the candidate be a strong contender for an overseas Fulbright Teaching Assistantship? Consider discussing the applicant’s interest in the host country and the age group they will be teaching. (90 words)

Guidance for Recommendation Writers:
- Personal suitability is at least as important as academic abilities – please keep this focus in your reference.
- Use specific examples to support your assessments.
- Comment on the applicant’s facility with English usage, grammar, spelling, and writing based on tests or papers prepared for a course, or from formal presentations, classroom discussion or individual interviews or exchanges with the applicant.
- Preview your work before officially submitting—the system cuts off text that exceeds the character count!
Writing a Letter of Recommendation for a Student Fulbright Research Grant

Thank you for agreeing to write a letter of recommendation for a Fulbright applicant. You will receive an automated message from Fulbright using their “Embark” system with instructions on how to upload your letter online when the applicant enters your contact information. No hardcopies are needed.

Overview: One year of study or research in any one of 140 countries. Applicants design their own projects, in any discipline, typically to work with advisors or attend courses at foreign institutions.

Timeline: Applicants wishing to study or conduct research abroad in 2018-19 are encouraged to submit a priority application, including reference letters, online by June 29, 2017. Over the summer, Illinois faculty will review submissions and provide feedback to candidates and recommenders. Then, a revised Fulbright application, including any updated references, must be submitted online by August 30, 2017, when our campus officially rates all applications before submitting them to the national competition. The official campus rating committee also may ask you to clarify or correct any errors in your reference. In that case, you will be provided direction on how to retrieve and resubmit your final letter prior to September 28, 2017 when the application will be sent out first for national review, and hopefully then to an in-country panel.

Guidance: Fulbright committees rate candidates on an array of specific criteria. Below is a list of related content suggestions for your letter of recommendation. These tips are based on the University of Illinois experience as one of the nation’s leading producers of student Fulbright grants.

1. Discuss the quality and feasibility of the student’s project. Does the student have the academic or professional skills necessary to complete the project in one year?
2. Will the candidate and the project help to advance the Fulbright aim of promoting mutual understanding through engagement in the host community, among other activities? Does the student demonstrate interest in the potential host country?
3. Discuss the student’s academic or professional record. What are your impressions of the student’s ability to work independently?
4. If applicable, please assess the student’s proficiency in the appropriate foreign language.
5. Address the student’s personal qualifications. Is the student mature? Hardworking? Collegial? Please include information that shows that the student is capable of living in a foreign country and able to work productively with a diverse range of people. The Fulbright is not only an educational exchange program; it is a cultural exchange program.
6. What impression will the candidate make as a citizen representing the U.S.?
7. How does the Fulbright experience fit into the student’s overall academic and career goals?
8. Keep the focus on the applicant, rather than your credentials, class, or department, except as those factors provide important background and context for the letter.
9. Telling stories has more value than a litany of superlatives (“Chris is smart, hard-working, and personable”). Bring the student to life with specific examples that relate to Fulbright’s goals.