

Writing Recommendations for the Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship

Overview: One or two year awards to students who demonstrate strong evidence of contributing to the technological advances of the United States. Current junior or exceptional sophomore students who are U.S. citizens, U.S. nationals, or resident aliens are eligible. Applicants should be committed to a PhD in a STEM field. This is a federal mandate. **Only students who have potential as academic researchers in STEM fields can be funded.** The University of Illinois is one of the top producers of Goldwater recipients, and we are looking to grow these numbers.

Timeline: Student applications, including recommendations, are due to an internal campus review committee on **November 27, 2017**. Please submit your signed letter as an email attachment to topscholars@illinois.edu. If your candidate is nominated, in mid-December we may also share any suggested revisions to your recommendation based on campus committee feedback. In case you choose to make any revisions, we would need your updated letter by **January 26, 2017** for the national review. The National Goldwater selection process consists of 20 reviewers in teams of 2 who will review all 1100 applications in 2 ½ days. The four criteria of the application is weighted evenly, the categories are:

1. Academic Achievement (GPA, difficulty of coursework)
2. Demonstration of progress towards goals
3. Research Statement
4. Letters of Recommendation

Guidance: Your letter of recommendation can help a student make up any lost ground in the other three categories. The Goldwater Program is mainly interested in funding students who have the potential to be *academic researchers* in STEM fields. A focus on the student's capacity to excel as a *professional* in their respective disciplines or achieve great success in the private sector, may weaken the candidacy. Below is advice from the President of the Goldwater Scholarship Program about what they seek in a strong letter of recommendation.

1. Discuss the student's potential to be an academic researcher.
2. If you are supervising a student's research project, please discuss it at length in terms of its potential contribution to the field, or as a sign of the student's research sophistication.
3. Please keep references to your biography and/or the rigor of your own classes at a minimum. The review committee is really interested in the student's potential as an academic researcher. Only if the student is taking a graduate-level seminar should you mention the student's performance.
4. If you are not aware of the student's lab experience (this usually applies to sophomore applicants), discuss the quality of the student's ideas in class or the potential for a project that student is interested in pursuing. Goldwater likes to see research agendas in progress or completed, but if the student has not yet had the opportunity they can still be competitive.
5. Would the student make an excellent addition to your own graduate program? Can you see the potential for the student to be a leading colleague in your field?

