Writing Letters of Recommendation
What we want to know

- Academic ability
- Personal characteristics
- Interpersonal skills
- Leadership qualities
- Work ethic
- Ability to function on a team
Academic Ability

- Where do they stand compared to their peers?
- Science and humanities
- If grades are <3.5, is there a compelling reason?
  - inadequate high school preparation
  - time to adjust to college
  - a bump in the road for personal or family reasons
  - Is there an upward trajectory?
Personal characteristics

- Knowledge of self
- Maturity
- Intellectual curiosity
- Independent learner
- Integrity
Knowledge of self

- Does the applicant know his or her personality, strengths and weaknesses, biases?
- Can s/he self-assess?
- Is s/he aware of personal learning style?
- How does s/he deal with a crisis? What is the applicant’s support system?
Maturity

- Has s/he shown the ability to deal with stressful situations?
- Has applicant demonstrated responsibility?
- Is the applicant self-reliant and independent?
- Is s/he confident, secure?
- Has s/he thought about long term as well as short term goals?
Intellectual curiosity

- Does the applicant demonstrate intellectual curiosity?
- Can s/he grow?
- Can s/he call a question?
- Does s/he demonstrate interest in being a life-long learner?
Integrity

- Is the applicant consistent?
- Are his/her experiences consistent with expressed goals?
Work ethic

- Gets the job done
  - Responsible
  - Reliable
  - Needs minimal supervision

- Energy
  - Full course load
  - Outside work

- Extra-curricular activities
  - Sports
  - Music/drama
  - Community service
Ability to function on a team

- Group projects
- Respects others
- Shares the credit
- Not afraid to share or delegate
Interpersonal Skills
Ability to relate to others

- Is the applicant empathetic, able to communicate, able to listen, broad minded, respectful of others?
- Does the applicant show a genuine interest in people? Does s/he have experience working with people?
- Has there been community involvement?
- Are there demonstrated humanitarian qualities?
- Is there recognition of needs of individuals?
- Does the applicant allow for differing values? Is s/he non-judgmental?
Leadership qualities

- Leadership positions
- Affected change
- Helped others rise
- Raised the level of discussion
- Respected by others
Clear and Logical Thinking

- Recognize problems
- What is known about the problem?
- What data are missing?
- How to find what’s missing
- Analyze data
- Suggest solutions
Motivation for medicine

- What drives the applicant toward medicine?
- What experiences/people have had a positive influence?
Knowledge of medicine

- Has the applicant spent some time in a patient care setting?
- Does s/he understand the rewards, demands, and frustrations of the practice of medicine?
- Does s/he have any concept of lifestyles of various types of practices of medicine?
- Does s/he value patient autonomy? Does the applicant realize there are patients who don’t cooperate with treatment plans, or who may engage in unhealthy lifestyle behaviors?
Knowledge of society

- Does the applicant know about delivery of health care in the U.S. and abroad?
- Does s/he have any understanding of the cost of health care and/or the breadth of those who are uninsured in the U.S.?
- Is there an understanding of the different types of medical insurance systems?
Consider various types of experiences

- Service
- Medical
- Research
- Leadership
- Humanitarian
- Sports
- Arts
Additional Letters of Recommendation

- Ask the right person
- Obtain and file letters
- Direct the letter writer
What if you can’t write a positive letter?

- Be honest with the student about his/her chances, merits, problems
- Be honest in the letter
- Suggest another writer for group letter
- Suggest individual letter writers