

FAQs about Letters of Recommendation and Letters of Support for the Haas Scholars Fellowship Program

Q. What should my mentor's letter of recommendation emphasize?

A. The strongest mentor letter will discuss the following four items: 1) your qualifications to take on your project; 2) the originality and feasibility of the proposed project; and 3) the mentor's commitment to, interest in, and, in the case of non-lab projects, suitability for guiding you through the process. (In the case of lab projects, your recommender may also want to describe other guidance you will be receiving, such as graduate students and post-docs with whom you will be consulting). For either lab or non-lab projects, it may be helpful for your mentor to discuss their role in the development of their proposal. 4) Finally, since building a scholarly community is a major goal of the program, we ask that the mentor give specific examples of how you will be able to contribute to a positive group dynamic.

Q. Do I need more than one letter of recommendation?

A. The Haas Scholars Program requires only one letter of recommendation from your faculty sponsor. You do not need to get additional letters of recommendation; however, you may wish to do so. Additional letters of recommendation can be useful in the following situations:

*You are just beginning to establish a relationship with your faculty sponsor, so you wish to include an additional letter(s) from a faculty member who has a longer view of your work.

*Your project is interdisciplinary in nature, and you wish to include letters from other faculty members who can speak to your different strengths and the merits of the project from different angles.

Remember more is not necessarily better. Be selective in requesting letters from people who can speak specifically and concretely about your qualifications and your project's merit. Wherever possible, seek letters from faculty members rather than GSIs.

Q. How should I submit letters of recommendation?

A. When you start your online application to the Haas Scholars Fellowship Program, you will enter the names and email addresses of your intended recommenders, who will then receive an email with a link they can use to upload their letters. Be sure to tell each of your recommenders that they will receive that email so that they are not surprised. Also, give your recommenders plenty of advance notice, as well as the latest draft of your proposal, so that they can comment on your proposed project in their letters. We recommend giving these materials to your recommenders *at least* two weeks in advance of the application deadline.

Q. What is the difference between a letter of recommendation and a letter of support?

A. A letter of recommendation is a confidential letter from a faculty member or other person qualified to evaluate the merit of your project proposal and your qualifications to undertake the proposed project. The Haas Scholars Program **requires** a confidential letter of recommendation from your faculty sponsor. You may also decide to request additional letters from other faculty who are in a position to evaluate your project proposal and previous academic work (see more on this below). Additional letters are optional. Your recommenders should be given a copy of your draft proposal to assist them in their evaluation and recommendation efforts.

In contrast, letters of support are typically from outside individuals or organizations -- or those besides your PI who are supervising you in a lab situation -- whose cooperation, assistance, or guidance you will need to ensure the success of your project. These letters help establish your credibility and convince the selection committee that your project is feasible. Such letters typically state the type of support promised. These letters are entirely optional, although they can sometimes be very useful.

Q. When should I get a letter of support?

A. Many project proposals do not require letters of support. For instance, if you are a biologist proposing a project to take place in a campus lab under the supervision of a Berkeley faculty member, you likely will not need to request outside letters. However, if you are doing field research that will require you to rely on the cooperation of an outside agency or individual, a letter of support can be very useful, although it is not

required. Likewise, if you will be relying on outside expertise to assist with some aspect of your project, you may well want to include a letter from that person.

Here are some examples:

*Your project involves interviewing migrant farmworkers in the Napa Valley. You include a letter of support from the head of a local community service agency who has promised to assist you with securing the participation of interview subjects.

*Your project involves travel to a historical archive in Virginia. You include a letter of support from the chief archivist describing the contents of the collection, addressing issues of access and indicating her willingness to assist you with locating materials.

Q. How should a letter of support be submitted?

A. If the letter or email purely addresses the support you will receive, and therefore the letter writer does not need it to be confidential, you may either use Acrobat Professional to append it to your proposal, or you may upload it as a separate document via the appropriate question in the online application.

If the letter addresses your qualifications as well as the support the individual will offer, it may be better to treat this letter as an additional academic recommendation or additional professional reference (so the recommender will receive a link to upload the letter).

Here are some examples of situations where you might want a letter of support:

* I plan to interview forty subjects and have secured the cooperation of ABC agency in identifying participants (see letter from the director of ABC).

* I will visit the archive during the last two weeks in July and have secured the assistance of Ms. Z in locating the appropriate materials (see letter).

Q. What if I have additional questions about letters of recommendation and/or support?

A. We are happy to discuss your specific situation with you. Please contact Leah Carroll by email (haas_scholars[at]berkeley.edu), phone (510.643.5374), or by requesting an appointment.