A Few Pointers on How NOT to Proceed

Whether looking for a job or planning for graduate school, there will be times you will need to request letters of recommendation from your professors. Here are some tips for obtaining these letters:


1. Read directions. Sometimes, letters are to be returned (in sealed envelopes) to the applicant. Others go straight to the school. Having to figure out which is which is not entertaining to your professor.

2. More generally, make sure your professor knows where the letter is to go. Guessing is not fun. (Check with them, too, about how they wish for you to supply addresses or envelopes). The "don't ask, don't tell" policy has no place here.

3. Make your deadline clear. From your busy professor's point of view, if next week is as good as this week, it is probably much better than this week. (That will be true next week, too.)

4. Be sure to sign the waiver section at the top of the form. (Sign it yes, or sign it no, but sign it.) Supplying letter-forms to people without first doing so is not helpful.

5. The person you ask to write for you might wish to see your vita and a statement of purpose.


1. Pick the right person. You are a senior, and you ask someone who taught you in a large class, a lower-division course, long ago, a class in which you did indifferent work, perhaps not even in an area particularly relevant to your current quest—not a strong choice.

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2. Ask the right question. Question (alt. 1): "Could you write a letter for me?" Answer: Certainly. Question (alt. 2): "Could you write an enthusiastically favorable letter for me?" Answer . . . (Hmm. What superlatives spring to mind for describing this person?)

III. Substance. How to plan ahead? Plan ahead. (This should come first, of course, not last).

1. Give some thought—before the time comes—to recruiting people who will be able to recommend you with enthusiasm. Get acquainted with them. Do not be a stranger when it comes time to ask them to help you secure the future you have selected.

2. Above all, do excellent work in their classes. Can you work hard, work effectively, think clearly, write fine prose, contribute to a class discussion? Do you have something to say, and do you say it well? (Are you a critical thinker, an elegant writer, a good citizen?) (continued)
3. To historians -- whether doing research or writing letters of recommendation -- evidence is crucial. Be sure they have what they need to write about you.

Peter Wallenstein
Associate Professor

The Last Pre-Registration . . .
October 19-26

Students will pre-register for Spring 2000 classes on op-scans for the last time this October. Virginia Tech will be going on-line registration next year. More information about the new registration procedure will be forthcoming. But for now here are the directions for pre-registering for spring classes: All information necessary to register will be in the hall outside 431 Major Williams by Friday, October 16. Each student will find an opscan, course history, advisor assignment, advisor questionnaire, and instruction sheet in a manilla envelope, in a box, in the hall. Course descriptions and timetables will also be available.

After accessing all pertinent information, sign up for an appointment with your advisor (a signup sheet will be on her/his door). Before your appointment, make some decisions about what classes you want and need to take and present your plan to your advisor for approval. Return the opscan, signed by you and your advisor, to 431 Major Williams by 4:00 p.m. on Oct. 26. Enjoy the process for the last time.

Bert Moyer
Chair

Message From the Chair . . .
American History Initiative Update

In late April, the Board of Visitors adopted a requirement that all students entering Virginia Tech after August 2001 demonstrate college-level proficiency in American History. Earlier, the Department of History had worked with the Provost's office on structuring the pending BOV resolution and, moreover, anticipating what actions and resources would be necessary for subsequent implementation. The department has now entered an intensive two-year phase of development. We are, on the one hand, exploring ways that in-coming students can show preexisting competency: Virginia Standards of Learning achievement test (or equivalent reporting from other states); Advanced Placement test; SAT II; and a computerized test developed and administered on campus. On the other hand, we are exploring ways that students can gain proficiency through instruction: the existing two-semester U.S. History core sequence; a new three- or four-credit overview of key issues (History 1004); credit from another university; or other Virginia Tech courses.

All these activities are requiring -- and will continue to require -- large expenditures of faculty and staff members' time. A team of three professors -- Mark Barrow, Kathleen Jones, and Daniel Thorp -- has taken the lead in the planning. However, the whole department has now made the initiative its primary focus. Although the academic year is young, the department is meeting regularly to ponder the broader implications of the BOV resolution. We have also formed three subcommittees to focus on particular problems. If your professors seem preoccupied with meetings this fall, the American history initiative might be the cause.

Club News . . .
History Club and Phi Alpha Theta

Phi Alpha Theta honor society induction was held Tuesday, October 5, 1999. A reception was held for students and guests following the induction.

Congratulations to those eligible to join P.A.T: Patricia Avent, Rhett Breeden, Casmira-Anne Brown, Michael Budicak, Joseph Caldwell, Joel Charboneau, Jason Clark, Ken Courter, Kirsten Davis, Beau Dickenson, Bradley Douthat, Benjamin Griffitts, Ben Grossman, Jason Haag, Meredith Harris, Cari Henson, Nicholas Lawrence, James Lincoln, Patrick McSherry, Brennan Maynard, Lindsey Mellon, (continued)
Kathryn Muller, John Preston, Katie Rask, Mark Rice, Brian Sinclair, Robert Toler, Christopher Visger.

The next meeting will be a BBQ cookout on October 9th, 1:00 p.m., at 146 Clover Valley Circle (Gwen King’s home). Plan to attend! Bring a friend!

Hugh Campbell
Editor

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**Faculty and Students . . . In the News**


Glenn Bugh is scheduled to appear with the lecture series “Roman Nights: A Multimedia Lecture Series on Ancient Rome,” October 27, in Camden, New Jersey. It is sponsored by the New Jersey Council for the Humanities. His topic is called “Augustus and Diocletian: Former and Reformer of the Roman Empire,” a discussion about how Augustus created an autocratic government and how Diocletian restored it to the Roman state.

Kathleen Jones’s new book, *Taming the Troublesome Child: American Families, Child Guidance, and the Limits of Psychiatric Authority*, has been published by Harvard University Press. She is now working on a history of juvenile homicide and suicide and hopes to offer a senior seminar in the fall on murder in America.

(continued)
During the summer Tom Howard presented a paper at the session on "Decolonization Comparative Perspective" at the International Conference of the World History Association in Victoria, British Columbia.

Jeff Beasley (Junior) participated in the reenactment of the Grant vs. Lee Campaign of 1864 over the summer. In October, he attended a Civil War living history and small battle in Waterford, Loudoun County.

Did You Know?

The last day to apply for Fall 1999 graduation in order to be included in the Fall Commencement bulletin is October 15.

The deadline to request rescheduling of FINAL exams (3-in-24 hours) is November 19.

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ALUMNI CORNER . . .
Where Are They Now?

Tim Faherty (Class of '96) stopped by to visit while on campus working the Business Horizons Job Fair. Tim is working for the State Corporation Commission and is willing to discuss SCC employment opportunities with fellow history majors. You can contact him at tfaherty@scc.state.va.us or call him at (804) 371-9629. He also left some brochures about the SCC in the main office.

Enjoy the Autumn Season

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