



## SUMMER UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH FUND (SURF) Letters of Recommendation – Information for Students

The following information addresses common questions students have about asking for letters of recommendation for their Summer Undergraduate Research Fund (SURF) applications. OUR Advisors are available to answer any specific questions you may have and to help you navigate the SURF application process.

### Who should I ask for a letter of recommendation?

Two letters of recommendation must be submitted as part of your SURF application. The first letter should be from the faculty member overseeing the proposed project. S/he must be a full-time member of the UConn faculty.\* The second letter should be from a faculty member of your choosing.

You want to ask recommenders who know you well and who can write a thorough and meaningful letter that speaks to your qualifications and potential to successfully complete the project you're proposing. They should be able to describe your work positively and be able to favorably compare you with your peers. It is your responsibility to discuss the **final SURF proposal** with your faculty advisor (1<sup>st</sup> recommender) before you submit the proposal. We also strongly recommend making the final version of the proposal available to your 2<sup>nd</sup> recommender so s/he can assess the quality of the proposal and include that assessment in his or her letter of recommendation.

***\*Please note:** If you elect to conduct research at an institution other than UConn, the first recommendation should be from your faculty supervisor from the institution where the research is taking place. The second recommendation should be from your UConn supervisor. The Faculty Review Committee looks closely at situations where students are working at other institutions. Recommendation letters should clearly communicate that the two faculty advisors are aware of, and in agreement with, the supervision arrangements for the project. The Faculty Review Committee looks for evidence of a strong plan of oversight in these cases specifically.*

### What if I don't have a faculty advisor to supervise my project?

If you have not already begun working with a faculty advisor who would be an appropriate supervisor for your SURF project, it is all the more important to begin drafting your proposal well in advance of the application deadline. A draft proposal is a concrete starting point for conversations with potential advisors, who will be able to assess whether they can assist you as you develop and carry out the project. Visit the [OUR website](#) for additional information about finding a faculty mentor.



Whether you have a new or longstanding advisory relationship, we encourage you to speak with your faculty advisor to develop shared expectations regarding your work together – covering such topics as learning goals, frequency and method(s) of communication, and mechanisms to receive feedback on your progress – to lay the groundwork for a successful SURF experience.

## How far in advance do I need to ask for letters?

Don't wait until the last minute to ask for letters. It's preferable to give your recommenders a few weeks of lead time to craft a thoughtful, effective letter. Be respectful of your recommenders' time; they have many competing obligations and if you wait until the last minute to approach them, they may not be able to accommodate your request.

## How do I ask for a letter of recommendation?

Set up meetings with potential recommenders to discuss the SURF award program and your project proposal. Bring the following materials with you to these meetings:

- A copy of the ***SURF - Information for Faculty Recommenders*** instruction sheet. Plan to leave it with your recommender once s/he agrees to write a letter on your behalf.
- A current résumé or a list of your jobs, internships, activities, honors and any other background information that would be relevant to your project proposal.
- A copy of your project proposal, timeline, budget, and other descriptive information from the application (drafts are fine) that may be helpful to discuss during the meeting.

Use the meeting as an opportunity to discuss and get feedback on your draft SURF proposal, to share your interests in and motivations to pursue the project, and to talk about what you've done thus far to prepare yourself to be successful in this undertaking. During the course of your conversation, politely ask if s/he would be willing to write a letter of recommendation on your behalf.

*"Do you feel you know me (my academic record, my skills and abilities, etc.) well enough to write a strong letter of recommendation to support my SURF proposal?"*

By asking this question, you've now given the professor the opportunity to either agree to write a letter on your behalf, or if they don't feel as though they know you well enough to write a strong endorsement, to decline politely.

If the answer is "yes," then provide your recommender a copy of the ***SURF – Information for Faculty Recommenders*** instruction sheet and go over the timeline and process for submission.

If the answer is "no," don't push or get upset. It's essential to maintain your composure and professionalism; you don't want to lose the opportunity for future advising or mentorship.

## Follow up with your recommenders

After your meeting, send a thank you note to each recommender letting them know you appreciate their willingness to write a letter on your behalf.

Prior to the application deadline, check in the online application system to confirm that both letters of recommendation have been received. If they have not, send a polite reminder of the upcoming deadline to your recommenders.

Keep your recommenders apprised of the outcome of your application and your project, checking in with them periodically and sharing updates.