Dr. Cooper’s Policy on Letters of Recommendation

Part of my responsibility as a faculty member at Youngstown State University (YSU) is to write letters of support/recommendation for students wishing to further their education, acquire new skills, garner honors/grants, obtain employment, etc. I take this responsibility very seriously. I write only honest, plain-speaking letters in which I critically evaluate, among other qualities, a student’s academic accomplishments, societal contributions, potential for success, and character. I do not, and will not, embellish any of a student’s qualities, or lack thereof.

Many students think that writing a recommendation letter is routine. To them, it is a foregone conclusion that the letter will be highly supportive of their application. Perhaps this might be true with letters written by some faculty, but for me, I must again iterate that I take the submission of recommendations very seriously. Afterall, a letter that provides false information or an exaggerated impression is both a disservice to the recipient and contrary to my personal integrity. Trust me, I will not suffer challenges or aspersions to my integrity.

Therefore, you must first ask yourself a question before requesting a letter of support from me – “Do I want Dr. Cooper to submit a recommendation letter that is sincere and constructively critical of my past accomplishments, present abilities, and future potential?” If you answer “No” to this question, don’t bother wasting my time or yours with a request for a letter of support. It is highly likely to be grossly negative and not at all beneficial to you. In fact, I am more apt to firmly decline your request. If you hesitate to say “Yes” or you think “Maybe”, then you should schedule an appointment with me so that we can discuss your situation. If you have the courage and the confidence to say “Yes” to the above question, then I would strongly suggest that you also schedule a visit with me to ask the following question – “Dr. Cooper, will you write a positive letter of support on my behalf?” This is a good and fair question to ask me since in the past students have requested recommendations without giving any regard to exactly what I might say in my letter. For some of these individuals, to their chagrin and sad surprise, I have been only more than happy to comply with a request for a letter of recommendation.

As a general rule, the following criteria will be used to grant a student’s request for a positive letter of support (though the level of enthusiasm it contains will depend upon the various elements comprising the quality of the individual in question):

- You were my student in one or more courses and earned a grade (or grades) of A or B. I may give some consideration for students who earned a grade of C. However, if you earned a grade of D or F, I will not write any letter on your behalf.

  or

- I have served with you on a committee or other venue at YSU, or you regularly sought my advice or input on an issue. You should have shown some leadership abilities as well as a commitment to excellence.
You must have had some interaction with me to earn a highly supportive letter. That is, for example, if you visited with me periodically during a semester in which you took my class, or you sought academic advisement from me on a regular basis, then I am likely to write a positive letter. If you request a letter from me, but had not taken the time to interact with me outside of class, at best you are likely to get a letter of luke-warm support.

If you are seeking a research position or admission to a research program, you should have some laboratory-based research experience at YSU, in a summer research program, or at another institution. You should be able to effectively communicate to me the activities in which you participated. I cannot evaluate your potential for research unless I have some evidence that you had some significant experience and understood what you were doing and why.

There should not even be a hint of academic dishonesty in your experiences. If I discover such activities, my letter will definitely reflect the facts. If I discover such facts after I have submitted a letter on your behalf, I reserve the right to send a follow-up message posting my revised evaluation of your character and abilities.

If I agree to submit a letter of support on your behalf, you must promptly provide the following items:

(Note: Many of these items can be transmitted to me by email at crcooper.01@ysu.edu. Be sure to put the words “Recommendation Letter Request” in the Subject line if this information is sent by email.)

- A brief one or two page resume listing your name, contact information, education/degrees, honors/awards with sources, activities on and off campus, and other information deemed pertinent to your application.

- A one page, brief statement of your immediate objectives, your career goals, your strengths and weaknesses (academic or personal, as you see them), and any other information that you believe important.

- A list of addresses that must be provided as an MS Word attachment in an email sent to me at crcooper.01@ysu.edu. Be sure to put the words “Recommendation Addresses” in the Subject line if this information is sent separately from any of the other items listed here.

- A copy of your transcripts (preferred) or your YSU patron ID number. I must have this information to adequately assess you academic strengths and weaknesses. Note: In the past, YSU has provided unofficial copies of transcripts to students without charge.

- Scores of any standardized tests that you may have taken, e.g., MCAT, DAT, GRE, etc.
Required forms to be completed. Be sure to complete the requested personal information and sign the appropriate portion, if present, regarding your rights and privileges.

If you are requesting more than two letters of support, please provide pre-typed mailing labels that the departmental secretary or I can place on the envelopes in which your letters will be sent. This will save time and effort as well as get your letter on its way sooner.

A few final words regarding my policy on letters of recommendation -

Be sure to give me plenty of lead time to complete these letters. Do not come to me one week before a deadline to write letters of recommendation. I may refuse to do so.

Only in rare circumstances will I return a letter to a student to submit with their application. I typically mail all letters from YSU. If you do convince me to return the letter to you for submission, it will be provided in a sealed YSU envelope with my signature across the flap. In addition, to deter “peeking”, such recommendations will have a statement at the top that indicates the letter was originally enclosed in an envelope bearing my signature and that the latter should match the one on the present letter.

I do not provide “blanket” letters of recommendation, i.e., “To Whom It Concerns” letters, for students to use at their discretion. Also, I typically do not give a copy of my letter to students for their files.

Should you have questions regarding this policy, contact me as indicated below. As always, I wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors.