



Letters of Recommendation Service

Frequently asked questions....

What is the letters of recommendation service?

For current students and recent graduates, the Career Services Office can maintain a file of recommendations free of charge to you for 10 years following your date of graduation. Career Services will then forward copies of these recommendations at your written request to graduate schools and employers. This file service is governed by federal law, The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 (OK 93-380) which states that your letters of recommendation may not be sent without your written consent. The law also provides that you must either:

- 1) **WAIVE** your right of access to individual letters, thereby giving up your right to review them and making them *CONFIDENTIAL*; or
- 2) **RETAIN** your right of access, thereby making the letters *NONCONFIDENTIAL* (open for your inspection).

Career Services has created recommendation forms that contain this important waive/retain signature box. It is the student's responsibility to type in their personal information (include your birth date and social security number) and sign the waiver section before giving the form to the writer for their use.

How do I decide if I want to waive my right of access to recommendations?

Conventional wisdom has it that most graduate and professional schools greatly prefer confidential letters, those for which you have waived your right of access, because the writer is more candid and, therefore, more helpful. Some faculty will write letters only when the student has waived right of inspection, so you should discuss this up front with the writers. However, it is your choice. FERPA further provides that once you have waived your right of access and the letter has been put on file, you may not reverse your preference.

To put this in context, most Trinity students elect to waive their right of access, confident that their relationships and discussions of future plans with faculty will result in fair recommendations. For those who plan to travel and perhaps work overseas, it is in their interest to retain right of access in order to carry copies of letters and readily provide them, avoiding the request process with our office. Faculty will likely write their letters on departmental letterhead. You must provide them with a signed waiver if you choose to have a confidential letter.

How do I request letters from faculty and former employers?

- 1) **Choose whom you will ask to write on your behalf.** Always choose individuals who know you well and in the manner most useful for the graduate program to which you are applying. Credibility of your recommendations hinges on this fact. Meet personally with anyone whom you have selected to write your recommendation to discuss your future plans, review your performance in a course(s) or on the job, and to define how and when you plan to use the letter. Be strategic: if you intend to go directly to graduate or professional school, think about ways that letters can add a dimension to your application; if you have no immediate plans for further study and/or your future is vague at this point, ask for a general letter which can be used a number of ways depending on how your plans evolve.
- 2) **Prepare the writer with additional information.** Provide the writer with a copy of your transcript and your résumé. This may take 10 business days to receive from the Registrar's Office, so request one NOW. Also, be sure to provide the writer with any specific forms, questions or guidelines the program you are applying to may require.
- 3) **Ensure that your recommendation file receives a copy of all letters written on your behalf.** Many faculty will want to send their letters directly to graduate schools. We recommend that you ask the writer to forward an additional copy of these letters to be put in your recommendation file in Career Services in the event you need them in the future (this happens frequently).

What is my responsibility in having letters of recommendation forwarded to graduate schools or employers? How do I do this?

You are fully responsible for this. You must work with the writers to ensure timely receipt of letters and follow up with them when letters have not been filed. We cannot accept a forwarding request from you pending receipt of a letter(s). Since it is in your best interest to have all your letters arrive in one packet, you may want to remind faculty when it is needed to have the letters on file for forwarding. We recommend at least two weeks before the due date to the school.

In addition, we must have your request in writing specifying explicitly which letters should be sent (saying “all of my recommendations” is not permitted under FERPA). To achieve this, we provide a Letters of Recommendation Request Form for your convenience available on our website and in our office. Email requests are accepted with verification.

Consider application deadlines, knowing that during the very busy season (September through February) it may take up to 10 business days to process your forwarding request.

What do I do if schools provide forms on which recommendations are to be written?

Schools include these as a convenience for you and for them. If the forms have check-off grids and/or special questions, ask the writers to complete these and either attach a copy of your recommendation and send it directly to the graduate school OR have the faculty forward the completed forms to Career Services. You must then work with Career Services to be sure these are handled the way the schools require. We cannot simply send the forms to schools because of legal provisions under FERPA, as noted before. You are in no way putting yourself at a disadvantage if you do not use the forms provided.

What if a graduate school wants me to send my recommendations in a sealed envelope along with my application?

Some schools use the “self-completing” application, enabling them to process your entire application packet upon receipt. You cannot be required to send your recommendations this way; rather, it is perfectly fine for your recommendations to be sent under separate cover. However, our office will work with you if you wish to fulfill the school’s request for a fully complete application packet.

May I have recommendations sent to me in a sealed envelope?

If you have not waived your right of access to letters, yes, we are permitted to send these to you. If you have waived your right of inspection to your recommendations, Career Services may send letters only to schools or employers that you designate.

Please contact Career Services with any additional questions.

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Check out the Trinity College Career Services Homepage at <http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/career>