Writing a Recommendation for the Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship

The Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship Program was created to encourage outstanding sophomore and junior students to pursue careers in mathematics, the natural sciences or engineering, and to foster excellence in those fields. In awarding scholarships, the Foundation Board of Trustees will consider the nominee’s field of study and career objectives and the extent to which that individual has the commitment and potential to make a significant contribution to his or her field.

Nominees are evaluated on:

- Demonstrated potential for and commitment to a career in mathematics, the natural sciences or engineering.
- Outstanding academic performance.

Your letter should address:

- The student’s potential and intent for a career in mathematics, the natural sciences or those engineering disciplines that contribute significantly to technological advances.
- The ability and desire to pursue advanced degrees in the sciences and engineering.
- Developed career objectives and involvement in an academic program that fosters the student’s ability to make a significant contribution to the chosen field.
- Demonstrated outstanding academic performance, maturity, initiative and motivation.

An effective Goldwater Scholarship letter:

- **Tells a good “story”**. Vague superlatives (“John is bright, conscientious, hard-working…”) are of little value. The letter must bring the student to life with specific examples of his or her exemplary qualities. Interesting anecdotes show that you know the applicant well. If you really think the applicant is “one of the two or three most outstanding students I have encountered in my career” you need to say why.

- **Makes the case for excellence**. In recent years, Goldwater recipients have had an average GPA of 3.9. Every student who advances in the Goldwater competition is assumed to hold great promise in a research-based career. If you regard the student as exceptional, your “evidence” should include more than his or her performance in one class. Your task is to go beyond the grade book.

- **Confirms and validates**. It is important for recommenders to comment on the seriousness of the student’s interests and career goals, to attest to the student’s research activities and to assess the student’s potential to make a significant impact on the world of scientific discovery.

- **Compares**. It is helpful to selection committees if you can favorably compare the applicant to other undergraduate and graduate students, you have taught who have gone on to Ph.D. programs and have been successful in research careers.

- ** Speaks to a scientifically educated reader**. You should assume that selection committees are generally knowledgeable in science, mathematics and engineering.

Submission of the Letter of Recommendation:

We ask that you submit a letter of the recommendation for the purposes of the campus nominating committee. Please be advised that the campus review committee may ask you for clarifications or to correct typographical errors prior to submitting your official letter.

Please email the letter to Elizabeth Colucci (colucci3@buffalo.edu) by November 1, 2017.

http://www.act.org/goldwater/