To: Students requesting Letters of Recommendation
From: Prof. Toni Bowers

I am delighted to write letters of recommendation for students who have done well in my courses. I don’t write letters of recommendation for students who have not studied with me.

I spend considerable time on each of these letters, and am as specific as possible about each student’s performance and abilities. I write letters regularly throughout the year, for both undergraduates and graduate students, and also for faculty at Penn and elsewhere.

Because I get dozens of requests for letters each year, I’ve put together this “handout” to give important information to students who may not have been through this process before.

-- Before I can say yes to your request, I need to know:

-- When is the letter due? I can’t normally get a letter written and in the mail at short notice during semesters when I am teaching, advising, serving on University committees, and carrying out research. Please allow at least a month between the date your letter is due and the date you ask me to write it.

-- Will you be using Penn’s Career Services office? Please do. The recommendation process is streamlined there, and the output is professional-looking and prompt. When you use Career Services (ground floor, McNeil building), each of your faculty letter-writers can write just one letter and have it sent to multiple recipients.

Because this service exists at Penn, I seldom agree to re-print and re-send a letter multiple times. Please don’t feel that because you need only a few letters, it will be easier if you just give me the addressed envelopes directly. It can be difficult to keep a number of students’ envelopes, forms, and deadlines organized. Use the Career Services office.

-- Please provide me with all the work you did in our class(es), including your graded work with my comments. This allows me to discuss your work in the comparative frame in which I evaluated it for our class.
-- Career Services will give you a form for me to attach to my letter. Please fill out the form as completely as possible yourself, including not only your own information but also my name, the English dept address, my job title (“Associate Professor”) and phone number, etc. The English website has all the information you will need to fill out the form. I should be able merely to write my letter, sign it and record the date.

-- If you are requesting an on-line letter of recommendation, please go on the website yourself and determine precisely what has to be done for letters to be posted. Send me exact instructions, not just the names of the programs you’re applying to or the program website addresses. Whenever possible, send me a link. Many of you know that I work with physical disabilities; I can’t troll websites to find out where my letter is supposed to go.

Thanks for following these guidelines, and my very best wishes for your success!

Toni Bowers