The Life You Create, the Letters You Ask for

When you are ready to ask a professor or administrator to write a letter of recommendation for you, that person will need to know a great deal about you and about the position you are seeking. Therefore, you will want to spend time in your freshman, sophomore, and junior years doing the things that will support the recommendation you seek.

Let’s pretend it is your senior year and you are ready to ask for recommendation letters. First of all, what would be the nature of the recommendation? Graduate school? Internship? Teach for America? Study abroad? Professional position in a work environment? Other? In light of the goal you want to win, what might be said about you in a recommendation letter at this point? If the letter is your bid for an intellectual award, more “gold stars” in that area are important. For other competitions or applications, it may be vital that you have proven to be a good sport, work well alone, or offer social skills.

Here is a list of items for you to think about.

**Intellectual distinction**

- Papers you have written. Papers you have submitted for publication. Papers that have been accepted for publication. *(The Pulse is Baylor’s new undergraduate journal in the College of Arts and Sciences at The_Pulse@baylor.edu Take advantage of this opportunity to submit a paper you are extremely proud of for consideration.)*. Letters to the Editor. Have you used your time well and taken seriously the opportunity to write? Do you write well? Are the topics you address serious?

- Languages you have studied. Excellence you have achieved. Are you a fairly confident speaker? List talks you have given, presentations you have made. Unique combinations of courses and concentrations are intriguing to committees--so are your creative contributions to academics.

- Is there an award you have received that recognizes your abilities by a group of people beyond your peers? Have you worked as a Supplemental Instructor or tutored in a subject here?

- What have you done that shows you are willing to give an “extra” measure of effort to some aspect of your academic life? Are you a leader in the classroom? Explain.

- What strengths of purpose to maximize your Baylor years does your transcript show? *(One recent interview for a pre-med student began with this question, “Tell me about your high gpa. Is Baylor just easy or were you just able to find all*
the easy courses?”—of course this interviewer was asking the question in this way to see how the student would handle the situation!

- Do you read the newspaper? What are the best three books you have read this year? What is the best course (or courses) that you have taken here? Why? What periodicals do you read?

- What professor might be willing to write about some aspect of your class work? Are you a leader in some classrooms?

- If you are particularly proficient in technology, how have you utilized that tool to good advantage toward furthering your academic goals? How good are your research skills on the Web and in the library?

Service to the community, your peers, your university, your church.

- What extended commitments have you made to someone or something outside your own peer group? What have you done to help someone who has been less fortunate than yourself? What have you done that blessed you and fulfilled part of your calling?
- Have you been in a leadership position with an extracurricular activity? Are you a member of any honor societies? What do you offer in friendship to your peers? How do you spend your summers?

How do you have fun? Are you involved in any sports? Many decision-making panels like to see that you enjoy engaging in a sport, even if it is ping-pong or walking.

In what ways have you assumed leadership roles while at the university? Is there a situation that needs addressing in an organization you are involved in? Is there a campus project that needs to be organized by you? What have you done that shows you have the courage of your convictions?

Have you worked on campus or held another job in town? What would people with whom you worked say about your attitude and behavior?

Does your life reflect a grateful heart? What ways do you live out your gratitude for all the good experiences and successes that have come to you?

Does your life seem to tell in most ways “one story” or are you still searching in many places to find out who you are? It is not necessary that all things come together cohesively during college, but if you begin to ask yourself the sorts of questions set on this page and if you have good friends with whom you can have serious and searching conversations, you may begin to see that your identity has some themes that resonate in
the core of who you are. Sometime when you want to reflect on your identity, one useful tool is to list the first twenty things that come to mind when you think of your favorite experiences and achievements. After you finish listing these good memories, consider what themes or patterns you can find within them. Would it be correct to say those are some of the most valuable themes or patterns in your life? How do those themes line up with your skills? with your religious identity? with your academic majors? with your career goals?