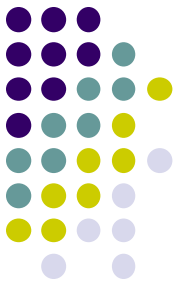


Crafting the Class
The Application Portrait Completion
The Counselor & Teacher
Recommendations

Crafting the Class

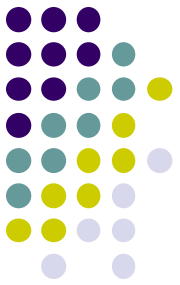
The Application Portrait Completion



- Each part of the Application helps to complete the student portrait.
- No one piece needs to paint a total picture of the applicant.
- The best letters of recommendation help to complete the student portrait.
- We like to talk about the 7 P's of the Application Portrait Completion.
- All 7 P's add up to the total portrait.
- No one recommendation should try to answer all the P's – the goal is the focused recommendation versus the general recommendation.

Seven P's

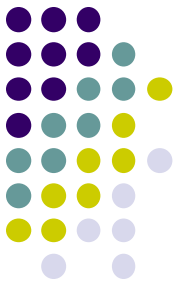
The Application Portrait Completion



- Program – curriculum
- Place – the context
- Performance
- Pattern
- Potential
- Participation
- Personality

Case Studies Evaluation Sheet Portrait Completion

*(Program, Place, Performance, Pattern, Potential, Participation,
Personality)*



Applicant's Name _____

Academic Profile

<u>Units</u>	<u>Honors</u>	<u>AP/IB</u>
09		
10		
11		
12		

GPA _____ Rank _____ (weighted/un-weighted; scale)

Grade Pattern (declining, erratic, inclining, etc.)

School Context (school rigor, AP's, college going percentile, profile)

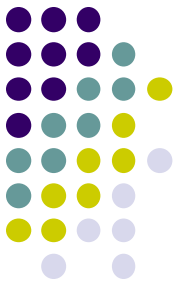
Testing

SAT CR _____ M _____ W _____

ACT Composite _____

SAT Subject Tests _____

Other Administrations _____



Case Studies (*cont.*)

Personal/Co-Curricular Profile

Essay(s)

Recommendations

Extracurricular Involvement (depth/breadth/impact)

Diversity/Well-rounded Class (ethnicity, background, values, interests, life experiences, religion, talents, geography, legacy, learning differences, home schooled)

Overall Impression

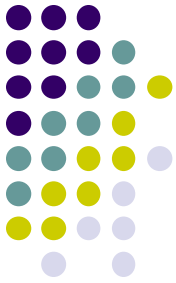
Action

Admissible? _____ Competitive? _____

Rec. Admission _____ Rec. Waitlist _____ Rec. Deny _____ Rec. Conditions _____

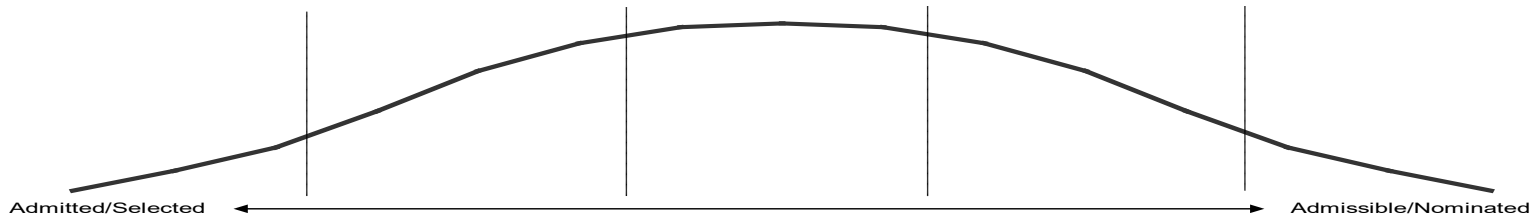
Refer to Scholarship Committee Yes _____ No _____

Selectivity Scale

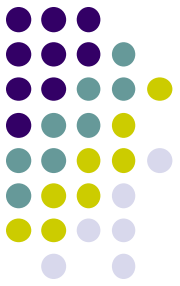


15-20%	35-40%	50-65%	75-85%	90%+
limited autos	some autos (objective)	30-40% autos	mostly autos	autos
bigger middle		smaller middle		
strongest curriculum - many AP/IB	strong (above average +) curriculum - rigorous	above average curriculum - some rigor, academic risks taken	average to below average curriculum	diploma earned
strongest scores	strong (above average +) scores	above average scores	average to below average scores	
strongest performance - all As	strong (above average +) performance - mostly As, occasional Bs	above average performance - generally As/Bs	average to below average performance	
impact/visibility notable beyond classroom - school, community, state; elected leaders	some notoriety in addition to academics	some talent, interests, activity with persistence or passion	varies	varies

Admission and Scholarship Selectivity Scale



“The Counselor & Teacher Recommendation”



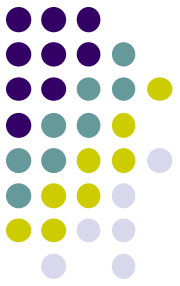
General Guidelines:

The recommendation should be a summary of your views on the applicant from the context of your interactions. Give your opinions. Let the admission office know how you feel and what you think, but support your conclusions with facts and anecdotal information about the student and his performance in your class.

Try to write in a candid tone as it adds forthrightness and sincerity to your recommendation.

A counselor recommendation attempts to discuss the student in relation to peers within the entire school and the community – to provide an overview of the student’s academic and extracurricular life – **a holistic portrait**. A teacher recommendation should focus on his/her contributions to the classroom as well as how the student thinks and performs in the classroom – specific to the teacher’s class and speaks to the student’s intellectual qualities. **It is appropriate for the teacher’s information be limited to the teacher’s classroom experience.**

“The Counselor & Teacher Recommendation”



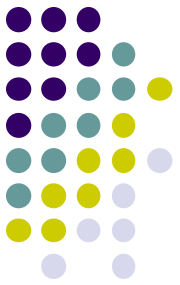
General Guidelines:

Attempt to avoid redundancy. Do not repeat information that would be on an application (e.g., activities, family information, etc.) unless you have different insights to share. Tell the committee something they will not find elsewhere. For example, teachers should write about their own experiences with the student in the classroom just as counselors should write about the student within the context of their interactions.

It is helpful for the teacher to discuss the student’s academic characteristics: classroom style, attendance, willingness to work with others, work ethic, study habits, curiosity, creativity, passion to learn, ability to think independently, and understanding of particularly difficult concepts. In particular, speak to what makes this student different from other students in the classroom experience.

It is helpful for the counselor to discuss the student in the larger context of the school and community. How has the student exhibited service and leadership? Has the student been engaged in extracurricular options? What is memorable or distinctive about their high school legacy?

“The Counselor & Teacher Recommendation”



General Guidelines:

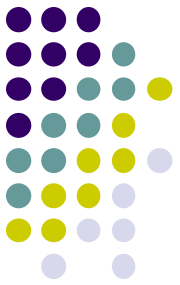
If possible, limit your letter to one page or at most a page and a half . It is important to consider efficiency of time for the readers. There is a commonly used phrase regarding excessively lengthy recommendations – “T.M.I.” or “Too Much Information”

Make some reference about your background and the extent to which you know the student. It is helpful for the reader to understand the perspective from which you are writing.

It is totally acceptable to prepare one letter to be sent to all schools.

However, if you have particular knowledge of why a student is likely to be successful at a particular institution, mention it in your letter.

“The Counselor & Teacher Recommendation”



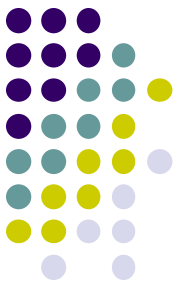
General Guidelines:

For the teacher, be an advocate for the student. If you can't say anything positive about the student, don't agree to write for him. Suggest that he ask another teacher to write his recommendation. For the counselor, this may not be an option and school policy and protocol should be followed.

Be aware that faculty members of admission committees will “unpack every word and sentence” that you write – especially, if they are your disciplinary counterparts. In the most highly selective schools, decisions in many instances are made by “splitting hairs” so to speak. And, they may “split those hairs” based on the words in both counselor and teacher recommendations.

For the teacher, describe briefly the “culture” of your classroom in terms of your teaching style, expectations, and types of assignments.

For the counselor, describe briefly your observations of the student in the greater school setting and your personal interactions with the student as well as your observations about their interactions with students, faculty, and staff.



“ The Counselor & Teacher Recommendation”

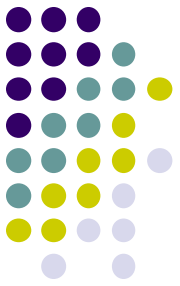
General Guidelines:

Whenever possible, be evaluative and make comparative statements, such as “highest grade on the exam,” or “leader of class discussions,” or “one of the most talented musicians in the high school,” or “the leading go to student in the senior class.

Don’t be afraid to describe or provide a reasonable explanation for a bad grade. Sometimes a comment about a “poor” grade can be as helpful and revealing as comments about a good grade.

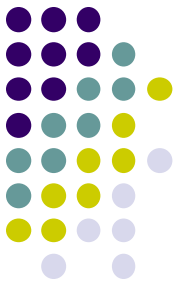
Don’t “gush” or make comments that appear too personal (“We’ve enjoyed a close relationship.”)

Don’t include a student’s physical description unless it’s important to the context of your class.



A Review of Qualities to Highlight

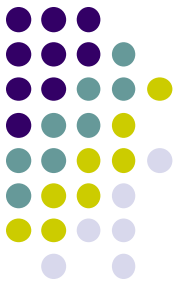
- Achievement
- Analytical ability
- Originality
- Creativity
- Problem-solving ability
- Research skills
- Communication skills
- Effectiveness in class discussions
- Insight
- Thoroughness



Use the Resume to Assist You

- Purpose of the resume – to refresh the teacher’s memory of the student’s performance in the class and to refresh the counselor’s memory of the student’s participation in the school and greater community.
- To allow the student to give the teacher his/her perspective of their classroom and school experiences
- To help the counselor or teacher identify student’s strengths, challenges, intellectual qualities, talents, and extra-curricular accomplishments.

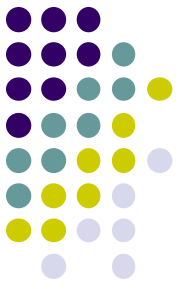
“The Counselor Recommendation”



Shaping Content

1. If you have insight about a particular college, feel free to tell us why, in your opinion, is this student a good “match” for this specific university?
2. What motivates this student?
3. How does the student spend extra time? What reasons does he/she have for allocating time and setting priorities?
4. If possible, tell us how the student handles him/herself during class/counseling sessions. Does he/she talk easily?
5. Can you include examples or anecdotes that relate your feelings about the student? “Joe is mature” is a valid statement, but an incident which conveys the character (of Joe) is often more helpful.
6. Can you remember your first reaction to the person? If so, was your initial reaction accurate or does thoughtful review lead you to different conclusions? Why?

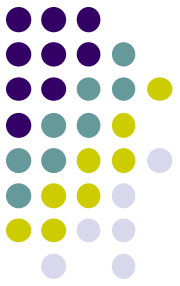
A Special Word to Counselors



Final Thoughts

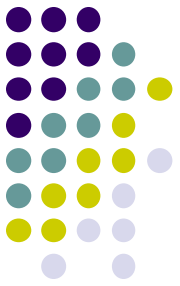
- Finally 1: Always try to summarize your feelings in the concluding paragraph. The first few sentences set the tone, but the last few “bring it home!”
- Finally 2: Where appropriate, suggest a phone call; or better yet, make a phone call. In many situations, your input can, may, does, and will make a difference!
- Finally 3: Provide a personal postscript. (Ron, Nan,remember that I spoke to you about this..... call me!)
- Finally 4: Presentation matters! Write legibly! Use spell check!
- Finally 5: Make certain that you fully understand your school’s policy with regard to letters of recommendations and confidentiality issues.

Significance of the Counselor Recommendations



In Summary, the Counselor Recommendation:

- Helps decision makers understand how the student has contributed to and participated in the greater school community.
- Fills in the personal or extracurricular details of the student's high school experience – colleges are looking for student – citizens in crafting their classes.
- Colleges are not looking to enroll the entering class of 2010, rather, they are seeking to enroll the leaders and problem solvers of tomorrow.

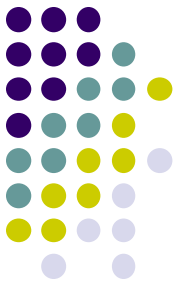


Significance of the Teacher Recommendations

In Summary, the Teacher Recommendation:

Helps decision makers understand how the student thinks and performs in the classroom

Fills in the academic details of the student's academic profile—colleges are looking for **students who can be academically successful** above all else. They are not looking to enroll the entering class of 2010, rather, they are seeking to enroll the graduating class of 2014.



● Discussion



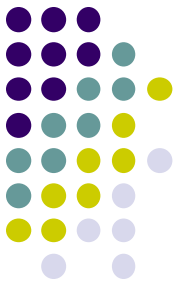
Critiques of Recommendation Letters

Letter #1:

One certainly gets a real sense of the writer's enthusiasm for this applicant. The reader is left with good insight as to the breadth and depth of involvement within and beyond the school community. The "urge to strongly urge" is a bit commonplace, but appreciated. Overall, this is a helpful letter. Then, we get to "Katherine" in the next to the last paragraph. **Who is Katherine?** This definitely brings issues of credibility/workload to the fore!

Letter #2:

Nice portrait completion, but unusually familiar, informal tone, and language. You get a sense of a hard working young woman who appears to have impact in important, but less traditionally, visible ways. Good overview, but she may appear similar to many others in a competitive applicant pool.

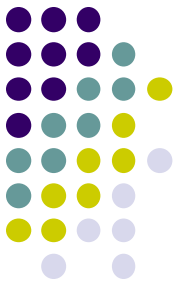


Letter #3a:

We can appreciate that the counselor thinks Althea to be “special” and “outstanding” but fails to provide the reader with examples that define those somewhat over used adjectives and the observed actions, deeds, or contributions upon which those judgments were based. Although lists of honors and memberships are provided, there is little stated that cannot be found on the activity sheet of the application. In addition, the reader can find the g.p.a., test scores, and rank on the transcript. Althea definitely would appear very similar to many others in a competitive applicant and/or scholarship pool.

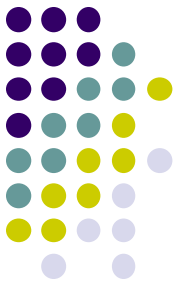
Letter #3b:

All the above comments apply to the Tribbiani recommendation for Althea Nichols. It seems rather remarkable that two students applying to the same college or university from the same secondary school possess identical attributes. “Form” letters of this nature definitely bring issues of credibility/workload to the fore! In addition, this type of recommendation does not set Donny Krull “apart” from the “crowd of qualified applicants” in a large and competitive pool.



Letter #4:

This is definitely a “damn with faint praise” recommendation. After reviewing his performance over the years, Lt. Col. Harlam’s assessments may be “on target”. At this point, the reader may be equally troubled by pondering two possibilities: 1) the poor judgment exhibited by Brandon in selecting Harlam to write a recommendation for him rather than a teacher in a class in which he had performed at a higher level; or 2) Harlam’s recommendation was the most positive that he could hope to receive given his performance across the board in all classes. In all fairness to Brandon, Harlam makes broad and far-reaching statements of opinion but provides few if any examples upon which he has based these assessments. The reader could conclude from the statements and tone of the letter that a conflict of personalities might be operative as well as Brandon’s lack of academic focus. At the very least, the Lt. Col. could have conveyed the same insights in a much more appropriate manner and come across as a much more credible and unbiased source.



Letter #5:

Excellent!

Letter #6:

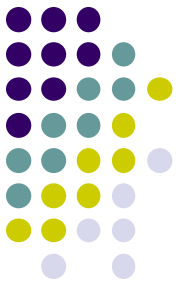
This is an extremely fine job. The teacher is persuasive because of his obvious sensitivity; this report took time and thought. We might well admit this student because we would feel we knew what made him tick, but we would not discount the message, so elegantly communicated, about his struggles with science. The professional educator will always remember that “getting the candidate admitted” is not his/her purpose (a sneaky lecture).

Letter #7:

We are getting an image of a hardworking, friendly, and outgoing student, but there remains a woeful lack of detail and “personality.”

Letter #8:

It takes little time to realize that nothing has been said here. It would seem that the counselor was merely discharging a responsibility to complete the recommendation. This collection of sentences could apply quite accurately to many applicants.



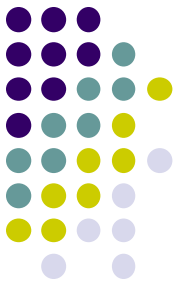
Letter #9:

This recommendation stands or falls on the student’s academic record. If this student does have an average record in math and science, then the teacher has done an extra-ordinarily sensitive job of providing accurate and crucial information. (That was the case with this student.) However, the other possibilities are that the teacher under-estimated this individual or did not want to give a positive recommendation.

We read this report while examining the applicant’s academic history, and if the math/science record had been strong, we would have entirely ignored this report. As is, it is a fine example of telling us that the applicant is probably “reaching” and would have trouble.

Letter #10:

Good opening hook – I’ll always read on! Otherwise, the recommendation is somewhat average in content/usefulness, though well written.



Letter #11:

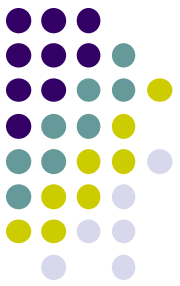
Who wouldn't find Jeff an appealing candidate? What does his transcript tell us? Excellent job by the teacher of "portrait completion."

Letter #12:

Tell us you do not know him!

Letter #13:

We don't think this says anything, but it certainly is an inexplicable exegesis of great pomposity.

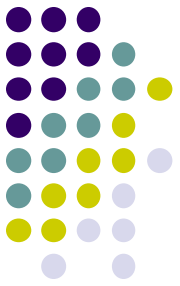


Letter #14:

This report lacks the kind of specific examples that would make it exceptional, but the intensity and obvious commitment of the writer to the student convey an extraordinarily positive impression. A reader will come away from this letter thinking very well of both the writer and the applicant.

Letter #15:

This descriptive statement is likely to arouse strong response from different readers across the country at various types of institutions. The problem with using such an approach (unless one knows who will be reading the file and knows that he or she or they will react positively to this type of rendition) is that some may react as negatively to this style of recommendation as others react positively. This may put the student at a disadvantage if the reader reacts so negatively to the style that the true character and contributions of the student become lost in the translation.



Letter #16:

There is no doubt that the counselor is sincere in his praise of Michael. However, series of adjectives that go on and on without examples on which to base those personal definitions of students can seem trite, shallow, and meaningless to the reader. Teachers are “overjoyed” to have him in class. Why are they so overjoyed? His parents are blessed because he is “neat”.???? He is the kind of son “**literally every** parent dreams of” but we have no idea why he is a “dream” of a kid. He “**excites every**” teacher and all campuses “**will recognize and appreciate his presence**”. This type of “walk on water” recommendation may not be the “kiss of death” for an applicant but it will never give an applicant an “edge”. No matter how well-intentioned the counselor’s efforts, it will not “stand up in court” as anything other than “opinion without proof”.