

# Teacher Recommendations

“First get your facts straight;  
then you can distort them as you like.”

-Mark Twain

# The Process (e.g. Princeton)

- All written materials in the folder are rated on a scale 1 to 6, 1 being the top, by two different Admissions Officers
- Quotes from teacher recommendations are often written on the front of the applicant's folder.

# The Process (e.g. Princeton)

- Teacher Recommendations are often projected for all to read—sometimes word-for-word—in subcommittee meetings.
- Teacher Recommendations are often projected again when the full committee meets (~ 2 weeks later).

# Competitive Climate

“Nearly every folder we read has high grades and high scores, so really it comes down to the applicant’s essays, the school letter and those teacher recommendations.”

–Bill Fitzsimmons, Dean of Admissions & Financial Aid, Harvard University

# Policies and Myths

- Do not complete any rating scales
- Do not discuss any disciplinary or absence issues
- Personal notes to Admissions Dean or as an Alum of the college no longer used
- “Less is more”

# What's Important?

- Are You the Student's Best Advocate?
  - If you don't feel as though you can write convincingly for a student, tell that student to find someone else.
- Don't Play God:
  - Trust & Truth are the currency of your letters. "You may cure the ill but you can't raise the dead."

# What's Important?

- The First Line:
  - The opening line of your recommendation will set the tone.
- The “Voice” of the Letter:
  - Is it authentic or is it flat?
  - Have you captured the student?

# What's Important?

- *Teacher Recommendation:*
  - What would it be like to instruct this student in a college course?
  - What would it be like to sit next to this student in a college class?
- *Clean, Condensed & Accurate:*
  - Run the letter by another faculty member who knows that student well.

# What's Important?

- Key Concepts:
  - Character, Creativity, & Interest
- Off-Limits Content:
  - learning style difference
  - health related issues (unless we have explicit permission)

# What's Important?

- Anecdotes & Metaphors:
  - Give the Admissions Officer a line or two to highlight & share.
  - Do your best to “capture the intangibles.”
    - Janet Rapelye, Dean of Admission, Princeton University

# Of Critical Importance:

- Internal Consistency of the Applicant's Folder
  - Does the School Statement (written by the college counselors) paint the same portrait as the teacher recommendations?
- Comments
  - In composing the School Statement, we lean heavily on class comments and advisor comments.

# Questions?

- Please feel free to get in touch with us in the College Counseling Office!