

MEMORANDUM

TO: Students & former students
FROM: Prof. Thaddeus Pope
RE: Letters of recommendation

I am happy to provide letters of recommendation for graduate school and employment. My regular practice is to have the applicant write a first draft of the letter.

I do this, because you can highlight the professional and personal biographical details that you think the reader wants to know about. You can better link to emphasize other things that I might not even know about. In short, you can best tailor the letter to the intended audience.

In your draft, be sure to recite the bases for my assessment of your work (e.g. in 2 courses, RA). And be as concrete as possible in describing specific accomplishments (e.g. got an A, co-authored an article). There are some other useful tips in the attached article from the September 2013 issue of *National Jurist*.

Err on the side of writing a too-strong recommendation letter. I will edit your draft for content, style, and format. It is easier for me to cut details than to create them.

to the correct audience.

- Bullet points reminding the professor of specific work you have done together. Examples: As a research assistant, you produced memos on X topics; in class, you participated in Y simulation; you wrote a paper on Z topic and received good feedback noting X; you did a pro bono assignment on Y topic that was challenging because of Z reason.
- Bullet points highlighting any particular information you would like emphasized, such as you have an extensive scientific background, you are the first in your family to go to graduate school, you held a part-time job throughout law school to help cover expenses.

Also be open about how the professor can help you. Your professor may be willing to email a recommendation for you to a practicing attorney who is the professor's former student, former law practice colleague or other contact. After you have made it past a screening interview, your professor may be especially willing to email a recommendation on your behalf.

Or the email may not be an overt recommendation. Instead, the professor may email a request that the attorney speak with you on the phone for 15 minutes or meet briefly for an informational interview, not for a particular position, but for general advice about pursuing a career in that field.

A professor who participates in professional organizations that interest you — such as specialized bar association committees or nonprofits — may be willing to bring you to a professional meeting to allow you to observe such work.

The professor may be connected to his or her own law school alumni network. In a rare situation, professors may be willing to email an alumni from their own law schools for a short informational interview. I have done that for students who wanted to relocate to faraway states for personal reasons and wanted to brainstorm career strategies with a lawyer established in that legal market.

Cold-calling judges

The judicial clerkship market is so competitive that many judges no longer open all of the applications. Some judges review

applications only from particular law schools.

But some judges will review applications if they receive a phone call from a professor advocating for that candidate. Obviously, your professor's advocacy will be more effective if the professor knows the judge or clerked for that judge. But if your professor is willing to pick up the

and not just because it is the right thing to do. A law school administrator or a professor — whether adjunct, assistant, clinical, legal writing or visiting — may have professional experience or professional connections that could benefit your search. Be pleasant to support staff. They were there before you and will be there long after you graduate. Professors and administrators

A professor who practiced in the field that interests you or is an expert in that field may be willing to brainstorm strategies with you. Make an appointment, be ready to explain what steps you already have taken and be open to new ideas.

phone to call a few judges on your behalf, even a cold call from a professor unknown to the judge can help get your application considered. I have cold-called many judges who have agreed to consider applications that might otherwise have remained unopened.

A professor who practiced in the field that interests you or is an expert in that field may be willing to brainstorm strategies with you. Make an appointment, be ready to explain what steps you already have taken and be open to new ideas.

Be sure to treat everyone with respect. That applies to everyone at the law school

may have loyal relationships with the staff. Mistreating them will reflect poorly on you and discourage professors from helping you.

The legal job markets your professors faced were not as challenging as the market you face. But your professors do want to help you land a job, and these suggestions should help your professors to help you pursue your career goals.

SARAH E. RICKS is a clinical professor at Rutgers School of Law-Camden. Before joining the faculty, she clerked for a federal judge and practiced law for 9 years.

If you don't remember why you went to law school

SHE DOES

DOWNED COWS · HOARDERS · OIL SPILL

These events have magnified the gap between how the legal system treats animals and the significant roles that animals play in our lives. Help close the gap. To find out how you can use your law degree to advocate on behalf of the voiceless, visit www.saldf.org and start or join a **Student Animal Legal Defense Fund** chapter today!

Animal Legal Defense Fund

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