“Student Tip Sheet”
General Tips for Writing Recommendation Letters, Nominations or Personal Statements

• Plan ahead. Read the instructions/guidelines and allow yourself sufficient time to obtain clarifications to any questions you have in order to meet the deadline for submission.

• Determine who should prepare the requested information. In some cases, self nominations are not allowed.

• Determine what information you need to collect before beginning to write such as specific information about your nominee.

• Provide the review committee with all the information they request. If they want answers to particular questions, answer them. If they ask you to address specific information/criteria, address it.

• Obey length expectations or limits, including font size, margins and attachments and provide additional copies as requested.

• Keep it well organized and concise. Make sure to check spelling, grammar and formatting. Avoid jargon or acronyms that might not be familiar to the reviewer.

• If appropriate to the requirements, start with a strong opening – this is the paragraph that will either grasp or loose the reader’s attention. End with a summary paragraph that ties all the important information together.

• Make it interesting. Think about how many of these statements review committees have to read. An interesting statement that addresses the criteria is more likely to stand out.

• Avoid potentially controversial subjects or inappropriate intimate information.

• Be honest. Don’t stretch information to make yourself or someone else sound better.

• Have others read your statement as appropriate – friends, family, or faculty. Take into consideration their suggestions.

• Provide a compelling example about something unique and personal (but not too personal). For example, you could tell a story about the candidate overcoming challenges, growing through past experiences, learning from defeat, or making a difference.

• You may also want to look for some universal truth or lesson in the story to which readers can relate as appropriate to the guidelines provided.

• Plan ahead. Avoid asking for extensions beyond the deadline date.