

## Developing a Scholarship Portfolio

### Scholarships

A surprising number of students fail to see that identifying scholarships can be one of the most important parts of the successful scholarship search. There are thousands and thousands of scholarships available to students through internet searches and scholarship guides, but no one student will ever qualify for all of them. Even if one person were to qualify for all of them, most students probably would not have the time to apply for each and every one. For this reason, a well-defined scholarship search can be invaluable to students looking for some extra money to fund their education.

The best and cheapest way to run a scholarship search is to find a good, reliable scholarship search engine (like fastweb.com or srnexpress.com). Internet searches are free (do not ever pay a fee for scholarship searches, instead use that money towards your education), and unlike scholarship guides that simply list awards, even when they are sorted by subject matter, the internet can help you filter out awards for which you simply don't qualify. This means finding scholarships that are best suited to who you are, both as a student and as a person.

Also, be sure to meet the scholarship deadline. You may be the highest qualified student for a particular scholarship award, but if your application was submitted late, you most likely will not be considered as an eligible applicant. Know the application deadlines for each scholarship application you're filing, and turn them in on time.

### Application Materials

Each scholarship has its own application. It is important to read the materials carefully and to understand what information is requested. Carefully typed applications make the best impression. Apply only for those scholarships for which you are eligible. It is highly doubtful that you will be awarded if you are not eligible for a scholarship.

Make sure to take the necessary steps to ensure your application gets where it needs to go. Before sending the application, make a copy of the entire packet and keep it on file. If your application goes astray, you can always reproduce it quickly. Make sure your name appears on all pages of the application. Pieces of your application may get lost unless they are clearly identified.

It would also be a good idea to send your application with Delivery Confirmation through the United States Post Office. If our office does not have your application on file, but you can provide proof of delivery by the deadline date, we will accept your copy as received on time.

### **Activities and Honors**

List all relevant activities and honors, but be selective. If you have more activities than can fit in the space provided do not include the ones that are not significant; the two days you spent last spring on a community clean-up day, for instance.

Read the criteria for selection carefully to understand what the reviewers are looking for. For instance, the Presidential Scholarship looks for applicants who can show "leadership experience with [an] outstanding extracurricular record," so include your volunteer and community service activities, emphasizing those in which you took a leadership role.

Most importantly, your activities should represent your varied talents and passions outside the class room. The reviewers are trying to get a sense of who you are and what you believe in. Make sure your activities reflect that.

### **Community Service**

One of the most underrated, but also the most valuable elements to incorporate into a scholarship portfolio are the activities that you have participated in, where you have done some service to the community without receiving payment or remuneration for. A

great scholarship candidate is one who has given of his or her time to agencies that help people in need, to religious organizations or to volunteer activities at their school. (In preparing to apply for a scholarship, you should try to become engaged in as many of these activities as you can, because review panels will value these activities highly. In fact, if you can get a recommendation from an agency where you have done community service it will benefit you and make you a more attractive candidate not only for service oriented scholarships, but any scholarships that you apply for.)

### **Letters of Recommendation**

#### *Choosing your recommenders*

These letters are extremely important. Choose your recommenders carefully. Think of the letters as an integral part of a package that will present an accurate and complete picture of you and your qualifications. Scholarships such as the Regents' Scholarship considers not only academic achievement, but leadership ability and community service as well. While maybe one letter of recommendation should be from an academic source, at least one should address your leadership abilities and commitment to the community.

#### *The ideal letter of recommendation*

Your letters of recommendations should come from teachers or academic advisors who are familiar not only with your academic abilities, but with your personal interests and background and how those relate to your ability to carry out the program of study you wish to pursue. If the teacher or academic advisor is familiar with your extracurricular activities and leadership abilities, s/he should also incorporate that into the letter.

The letters should address the qualifications sought. Recommenders should address only those elements of your application on which they can comment confidently.

#### *How to ask for a letter of recommendation*

Start early. Discuss your plans with your recommenders now, before the application is

even available. Let them know what you would like to study and why you want to apply for the scholarship. These discussions can help you clarify your goals and plans as well.

As soon as you have the application forms, schedule a meeting with your recommender. Give your recommender a written description of the scholarship and a copy of your personal statement and proposed academic program. You may also want to provide a copy of your transcript and an autobiography or resume highlighting activities and honors. You should also give your recommenders appropriately addressed envelopes with postage, if necessary. Be sure to also give them plenty of time to write the letter, do not wait until the last minute.

You may also want to remind the recommender that it should include your full name with middle initial. You would be surprised on how many include only the first name of the student within the body of the letter.

### **The Personal Statement**

The following section is an excerpt from the Yale University Undergraduate career Services' publication entitled *Applying for Fellowships*.

"The personal statement presents an opportunity for you to speak about yourself. Your essay should show that you have ideas and opinions, are able to think logically, and can express yourself clearly, with economy and elegance.

Clear writing is the result of clear thinking. The first and most important task is to decide what you want to say. This is a short essay. You must be highly selective. Consider carefully what you wish to impress upon the reader. Remember the nature of your audience. It is composed of people who are probably as intelligent as you are, well educated, and vastly experienced in this work. Do not try to fool or second guess your reader; you will seem silly if you do. Do not write in a cute, coy, or gimmicky style:

selection committees have heard it all already. Do show that you have thought deeply and broadly about what you have learned in your academic career and what you hope to learn next.

When you have written a first draft, start the work of refining, simplifying, and polishing. Do you say exactly what you mean? Is any section, sentence, or word superfluous, ambiguous, or awkward?

Are your verbs strong and active? Have you removed unneeded qualifiers? Are you sure that each accomplishment and interest you mention supports one of your main ideas? Do not apologize. Do not misrepresent yourself. You are writing as an adult who wishes to join the community of scholars and other professionals. You must write as a peer and potential member of such a community.

Correctness and style are vital. Neatness counts. Check and check again your spelling, the agreement of verbs and persons, syntax. Your thoroughness demonstrates that you have learned and mastered this art and that your future teachers and colleagues will not be troubled with sloppy thinking or writing.

Ask several individuals whose judgment you respect to read and criticize a draft of your essay. Possible reviewers include faculty members, writing tutors, and friends who can assess how well your essay represents you."

### **A final note**

Remember, in any application (for a job, grant, graduate school, etc.) the powers that be want to know three things: why is it important to you, why it is right for you and why you are right for it. Your application should be built around this message.