

Sample Recommendation Letter from Penn State University Online compiled by Joe Schall

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I am pleased to recommend Janet Lerner for a Truman scholarship. I know Janet well: She has worked for me as a student peer advisor for the last year and she took an honors seminar from me last semester.

Janet is a bright, energetic student who is passionate about issues of civil and human rights. She is a leader on campus who works well with both students and administrators. Likable and assertive, Janet will make a strong impact in her community and American politics in the years to come.

In this letter I want to focus on Janet's academics. Janet took my seminar entitled "Critical Reasoning in Politics," the first course in a sequence for our honors students who will be writing a thesis in their senior year. The course introduces students to the basics of social science research while they develop a proposal for their own thesis research project. Janet received one of four A's (in a class of 14).

Early in the semester I was concerned about how Janet would do. Often when students choose a research topic about political issues they feel strongly about they are unable to develop a satisfactory research project. They have difficulty stepping back, reading literature contrary to their views, and developing a project that can ultimately prove them wrong—a benchmark for good social science. Janet dove into exactly this sort of project.

She did an excellent job. She quickly learned what it meant to design a research project. She adopted and discarded several ideas without losing sight of her central interest. She read in a variety of literatures and framed her questions in many ways. She persevered, she read, she got frustrated, and she stuck with it. In the end she came up with what I believe will be an exceptional project on how activist groups promoting same-sex unions and marriages frame their arguments and issues across the American states. I would be happy to advise her on her senior project if she asks.

Janet's A was well-earned. She writes well, she is deeply analytical, she frames interesting and important questions, she applies literature and other arguments, and she elevates the performance of those working with her. In addition, Janet is a valuable contributor to class discussions. She pushes issues other students may be reluctant to discuss, but she does so in a way that is non-threatening and inviting.

As a White student double-majoring in African and African-American studies, and a straight woman leading a campus gay and lesbian activism group, Janet is exceptionally talented at bringing people together and seeing the world through the eyes of others. She is an important leader now and will continue to be in the future.

Sincerely,

John Teacher

John Teacher

Associate Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies