

How not to “Gender” Recommendation Letters

Led by: Vice President for Research Peter Dorhout

Wednesday, April 6, 2016

12-1pm, Union Room 202

Hosted by: KAWSE <http://www.k-state.edu/kawse/>

When writing a letter:

1. Focus your comments directly on the requirements of the position/award/etc.
2. Use the language of the position/award.
3. Make sure you are not referring to historically under-represented group members' personality (e.g., “xxx is warm”) or their work ethic (e.g. “xxx is hard-working), rather than their qualifications for the position (e.g., leadership skills, intelligence).
4. If you find you are writing a positive letter and then write “but I wonder about xxxx”. This is a warning sign that you are veering away from the facts and data about their skill set relevant to the job.
5. Ask the person asking you to write a letter for you to provide a draft of the letter they would like you to write or talking points. A CV or resume' is not enough information.
6. Review the citations below.

When asking someone to write a letter for you:

1. Draft a letter for your letter-writers that follows the advice above. At a minimum, provide them with “talking points”.
2. Review the citations below.

When you serve on a committee:

1. If you have direct knowledge of the letter-writer's tendency to “over-rate” or “under-rate” applicants, you might point that out to the committee.
2. If there is a gap in an applicant's record, discourage the committee from making assumptions about the reason for that gap. Only data- from letter-writers or the applicant- should be used to make sense of gaps.
3. In general, if you find the committee speculating, remind the committee (and yourself) to refrain from uninformed speculation. Focus on the data.
4. Review the citations below.

References

Steinpreis, R.E., Anders, K.A., and Ritzke, D. (1999). The impact of gender on the review of the curricula vitae of job applicants. *Sex Roles, 41*, 509-528.

Trix, F. & Psenka, C. (2003). “Exploring the color of glass: Letters of recommendation for female and male medical faculty.” *Discourse & Society, 14*(2), 191-220.

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