Letters of Recommendation
Problematic Letters

- Negative
- All about the writer or his/her project or class
- No context for understanding final recommendation
Negatives will sink an applicant

- Lack of enthusiasm
- Negative words (eg “mediocre”)
- “Top 50 %”
How do you tell the student that you are not the best source for a letter of recommendation?

• Be honest with the student about his/her chances, merits, problems (see “Crucial Conversations”)
• Say you must be honest in the letter
• Suggest other letter writers
Committee Letters
Context is Helpful

• Who is on the committee?
• What types of ratings does the committee give?
• What are the criteria for each category of rating?
• What percentage of your students typically get each rating?
Incorporate others’ impressions

• Quotes from other letters/evaluations

• Paraphrasing others’ comments

• Reference to others
Organize the letter into domains

- Interest
- Personality/ Empathy/Other-oriented
- Team player
- Intellectual curiosity
- Self starter
- Leadership
More detail

• Ability to work on a team/ Communication skills
  – Respects others
  – Shares the credit
  – Not afraid to delegate

• Work Ethic
  – Gets the job done
  – Energy

• Leadership
  – Affected change
  – Helped others rise
  – Raised the level of discussion
  – Respected by others
More domains

• Research
• Community Service
• Outside Interests

✓ Summary
Samples

- Same Applicant - Different Writers
- Same Writer - Different Applicants
- Specific Domains
QUESTIONS