



ASTRONOMY AND ASTROPHYSICS

Letter of Recommendation for Graduate Admission

TO THE APPLICANT: Please complete the following before giving to recommender.

Name of Applicant: _____

College or University: _____

Degree sought: _____ Beginning of Fall 20 _____

I **do** / **do not** (circle one) waive any right to inspect the recommendation submitted by

(name of recommender)

Signature of Applicant _____

TO THE RESPONDENT: Admission to the astronomy graduate program at the Pennsylvania State University is competitive; the faculty admit the top 20-25% of the applicant list. Most applicants appear qualified on the basis of their undergraduate records, so in this ranking such factors as motivation, ranking among similar students, potential for independent research and adaptability to a demanding graduate program play an important role. Letters of reference are the best, perhaps the only, source of such information, and we ask that you provide us this information as best you can, rather than information which appears elsewhere in the students application (transcripts, GRE scores, *etc.*).

A candid, factual reference letter will not only assist us in our selection process, but will also benefit the student, since overly kind, generic, noncritical letters tend to be disregarded or may result in admission to a program that is not suitable for the student. According to university regulations implementing the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, your letter will be shown to the applicant only if he/she becomes a graduate student at the university and only upon written request. You may, of course, request that the applicant sign the waiver of these rights, at the top of this page.

The following suggestions, some of them obvious, are made with the hope that they will help in producing letters which are more helpful to our admissions committee:

- quantitative comparison with past and present similar students (*e.g.*, top 15%, *etc.*);
- comparison with students who are or have been in our program, or who are otherwise likely to be familiar to us;
- specific examples of excellence, abilities, and motivation for graduate work in astronomy;
- examples of junior, senior, or graduate level research performed, with evaluation (originality, independence, initiative, enthusiasm);
- how you think he/she will accommodate to a rather demanding, rather formal, moderate-size, first year graduate program;
- frank discussion of pluses and minuses as a potential graduate student, particularly those which are distinctive or unique.

Please write your letter on your own or your institution's letterhead, attach this page, and return both to:

*The Department of Astronomy & Astrophysics
The Pennsylvania State University
525 Davey Laboratory
University Park, PA 16802-6305*