

The Mitchell Scholarship

The Mitchell Scholarship, named to honor the former U.S. Senator George J. Mitchell’s contribution to the peace process in Northern Ireland, funds one year of graduate study at an Irish university to twelve students per year. The scholarship provides airfare, tuition, fees, housing, and a stipend for living expenses. The Mitchell Scholarship Selection Committee interviews 20 finalists for the 12 scholarships in Washington, D. C.

As with several other national scholarships, students must have no fewer than five references and no more than eight. Commenting on this number of references, the Mitchell Scholarship website notes that “The quality and not the quantity of the recommendations is what matters. Applicants are urged to register more than the minimum recommenders in case the absence of recommendation may jeopardize the candidacy of an applicant.” Recommenders also must note that the deadline is strict for their letter submission and will not be waived for any reason. Because the application package for the Mitchell Scholarship is due early in the academic year (October), students may—and probably should—request a letter of recommendation from you during the spring.

Writing the Mitchell Scholarship Recommendation

The criteria you should address in a Mitchell Scholarship recommendation letter include:

- Documented evidence of a student’s achievements in academics, leadership, and service;
- Ability and maturity to pursue advanced study at an Irish university of the student’s choosing;
- If appropriate, commentary on how the student’s proposed plan of study could contribute to US-Ireland relations.

Recommendation letter writers are urged to provide candid commentary in the above areas, without ignoring the areas of leadership and service. Some recommenders fail to address leadership and service directly in their letters, or fail to define the categories broadly enough in their examples. Although there is no minimum GPA necessary for the Mitchell Scholarship applicant, and excellent undergraduate record and preparation for the proposed field and graduate study are vital to an applicant’s success.

In the two sample Mitchell Scholarship recommendation letters provided, not how the first letter amplifies on the student as a leader enrolled in a graduate-level seminar, and how two full paragraphs are devoted to context for the student’s interest in Peace and Conflict Studies directly connected to “issues of gender and politics in Northern Ireland.” The letter does not skimp on detail about either the student or the political circumstances in Northern Ireland where the student aims to study. The second letter, even more detailed than the first, gives abundant examples of the student’s personality and character, linking these directly to her leadership skills. Most interesting, perhaps, is how the student is characterized as a “forceful advocate” particularly interested in contemporary politics and “issues important to youth.” As with other national scholarship contenders, this student is unafraid of conflict and challenge, and thus the recommender can present her as a person engaged in the struggle to solve real-world problems.

On-line Issues Specific to the Mitchell Scholarship

When students register you as a recommender for the Mitchell Scholarship, you automatically receive an e-mail explaining your role in the application process. The Mitchell Scholarship website provides excellent advice to help the recommender accomplish what may be for some a daunting and first-time task: submitting the recommendation letter on-line. This is mandatory for recommenders serving the Mitchell Scholarship, and naturally there are some hurdles in this process—including entering the letter into the submission form, the interpretation of specific error messages you might receive, and discerning whether your letter has been successfully uploaded. The best approach to clearing these hurdles is a bit of extra time and willingness to troubleshoot common and surmountable problems with the help of the Mitchell website.

At the bottom of the root page for the Mitchell website (URL below) is a link for the “Princeton Review support website.” Here you will find answers to questions asked frequently by both the applicant and recommender, and reviewing these pages may be necessary for you to submit an on-line recommendation letter successfully. The quickest way to pull up the relevant menu of questions is by typing “recommendation” into the search box provided on the Princeton site.

**For complete detail on the Mitchell Scholarship, go to
<http://www.us-irelandalliance.org/scholarhsips.html>**

SAMPLE MITCHELL SCHOLARSHIP RECOMMENDATION

October xx, 20xx

The US-Ireland Alliance
1747 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, 12th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20006

To the Mitchell Scholarship Selection Committee:

I am writing a letter on behalf of Ms. **Janet Lerner**, an international studies student at Mythic University who is applying for the Mitchell Scholarship. To get straight to the point, Janet is, without a doubt, one of the strongest undergraduate students I have had the pleasure of working at Mythic University.

I am Janet’s co-advisor for her honors thesis and she has enrolled in several of my classes. Most recently, Janet was the sole undergraduate student in a graduate seminar I taught titled *Qualitative Methods*. Her performance was outstanding. I enjoyed watching her successfully grapple her way through some very difficult readings in the area of social theory. Additionally, she was a discussion leader she grounded very difficult theory which helped alleviate some of the initial nervousness of the other students in the class. As I noted from her discussions, she is one of those rare students who can operate at an advanced theoretical level while keeping firmly rooted in an empirical realm.

Over the past year I have watched Janet’s interest in Peace and Conflict Studies blossom into a very powerful thesis topic on issues of gender and politics in Northern Ireland. My area of expertise is in the area of gender and nationalism in Northern Ireland; for this reason I am confident when I say she has chosen a fascinating topic for exploration. As part of her research, Janet conducted a case study of the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition (NIWC) last summer. She spent three months in Belfast conducting ethnographic and archival research. The NIWC is a cross-community coalition that was formed in 1996 and fully participated in the peace talks which led to the signing of the Easter Agreement. Recently, the NIWC has found itself at the center of political debates focused on issues of gender, class, and nationalism.

Having carefully reviewed Janet’s data based on her NIWC case study, I can affirm that her work is top-notch and is on par with the graduate students in the geography department. Such a claim is no small matter. Mythic University’s Geography Department is the highest ranking geography department in the country based on a recent report by the National Research Council, so it is important to understand that I am comparing Janet with some of the best graduate students in the discipline.

Finally, Janet has a strong understanding of political theory and strong intellectual facility. She writes well and clearly and will complete her career at Mythic University undoubtedly to much acclaim. She is rare and gifted scholar and has my strongest support. She really is one in a million.

Sincerely,

Janet Teacher

Janet Teacher

Assistant Professor of Geography and Women’s Studies

SAMPLE MITCHELL SCHOLARSHIP RECOMMENDATION

September xx, 20xx

The US-Ireland Alliance
1747 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, 12th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20006

To the Mitchell Scholarship Selection Committee:

I am pleased to write in support of **Janet Lerner’s** application to receive a Mitchell Scholarship. I know Janet well; she initially developed her thesis proposal in one of my classes and I direct a workshop in which she is bringing that proposal to fruition with other seniors. I am also her honors advisor in Political Science, and I selected her to serve as the undergraduate representative to the department Undergraduate Committee, which I chair. We talk frequently about her academic interests, career goals, travels, and many campus responsibilities.

Janet is impressive, and growing more so each year. Her academic work is excellent: she writes well, she offers valuable and at times exceedingly insightful comments, she is always prepared, and on group projects she elevates the performance of those around her. But without doubt her finest academic achievement is the honors thesis she is now writing. I believe it will be among the best we have seen here in the last ten years, and we produce an average of eight to ten these a year.

Janet developed and refined her research proposal on collective identity in Northern Ireland women's groups in a class she took with me two years ago. No honors student that I have worked with, let alone a sophomore, has developed a research idea and then set up the appropriate field work with comparable skill and determination. Janet used her junior year to do advanced graduate course work on comparative methods. She then spent the summer conducting interviews and doing archival research. And what a trove of material she has developed! Rich, sensitive, and theoretically revealing interviews that demonstrate her grasp of the material and ability to connect with her subjects. I expect her thesis to make important academic contributions to our notions of identity and its importance to politics as well as substantive contributions to our understanding of politics in regions plagued by years of conflict. My hope is that she will continue to mine her material and push her ideas in advanced academic work, preferably in Europe.

But to fully appreciate Janet Lerner you need to go far beyond her intellectual abilities. She is a force on campus and outside, but one who tends to work within rather than outside the system.

Janet is responsible, organized, articulate, exceedingly driven, and personable. Other students defer to her judgment and arguments. I chose her to serve on my undergraduate committee, which is engaged in an overhaul of our curriculum, for all these reasons. But I have actually been pleasantly surprised by her work on the committee because of the extent to which she has been such a forceful advocate for students' interests. This is not the easiest thing to do—to tell three professors what they should be doing. From the first day, however, Janet demonstrated the role she would play, and we quickly came to rely upon her as a vital participant in our deliberations.

I should note one or two other aspects of Janet's personality and character as well, in that they are so public and striking. First, she is aware and involved with contemporary politics, in particular issues important to youth. Her work to promote voting among college students, her web broadcasts of the conventions, her active support of the quality team teaching program at the Mythic Institute for Learning, and her recent involvement with the World Business Dialogue and World Student Summit all demonstrate, to me, that she has her finger on the pulse of the college campus, American youth, and increasingly international youth as well. This is an essential part of how she defines her leadership skills. Second, Janet is wonderfully authentic. She talks about her accomplishments with joy, her failures with disappointment, and her plans with enthusiasm. Finally, she is ambitious without seeing herself in competition with others. In a variety of settings, I have seen her contributions to other students and the larger community.

I believe Janet Lerner is a natural to receive a Mitchell Scholarship. She has a deep and sincere interest in Irish politics, and her work requires that she study with scholars close to her subject. Her plan of study strikes me as well-suited to the opportunities the Scholarship presents.

Please contact me if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

John Teacher

John Teacher

Associate Professor

Political Science Honors Coordinator