MU MYTHIC UNIVERSITY

123 Ivy Road, Mythic CA 99999   555-123-4567

December xx, 20xx

To the Review Committee:

I am pleased to write a letter of recommendation for Janet Lerner, an honors undergraduate student in our program. I have known Janet for more than two years. I came to know her very well when she was a student in my economic geography course. This summer, I hired her to work on an NSF-sponsored research project on Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change. And for the past six months, we have been developing a laboratory manual for my undergraduate course on the global economy. It is on the basis of this extensive experience that I write a letter of unequivocal support.

Janet is an undergraduate student in the honors program at Mythic University. The honors program is designed to provide the educational experience of a small Ivy League college within a large public university. To be accepted, a student must have high SAT scores, be an excellent writer, and have very good high school grades. Students fulfill their course requirements by taking honors courses or by selecting a combination of classes with a heavy emphasis on graduate seminars and independent reading courses. Students must maintain a GPA of 3.2 or better in all courses in order to remain in the honors program. Janet has fulfilled this requirement admirably, maintaining a GPA of 3.8 or better throughout her career. Over the last few years, Janet designed a difficult curriculum for herself and has been very successful in combining graduate seminars and advanced undergraduate reading courses to fulfill her degree requirements. She is comfortable with herself and is well-recognized by her peer group. She, along with her peers from the honors program, will enter the nation's best graduate schools next year in such varied fields as medicine, law, and other allied social sciences. She seeks to enroll in your graduate planning program.

Janet is an enthusiastic, energetic, and exceptionally well-organized student. She writes beautifully, is widely read, and demonstrates good quantitative skills. In my economic geography course, she was the best student in the class. Her performance exceeded that of the incoming graduate students, including an NSF fellowship recipient. She always came to class prepared and was clearly far above her peers in understanding and appreciating the course material.

I have been especially impressed by Janet's determination and sparkle. Her work on the Model United Nations program (MUN) is an extremely large responsibility. The Model United Nations program convenes approximately 1000 high school students from around the world to simulate the experience of the UN. Janet has responsibility for designing and executing all phases of the simulation. She reviews the agendas of the UN over the previous year, and then collaboratively develops the student-run assembly

agenda. To undertake this task successfully, she must understand international relations, international political economy, and world economic development issues. Her UN work has clearly influenced her interests and has been a very broadening experience for her. I am sure one explanation for why she has done so well in courses with me is that she understands the geography of the global economy from the simulated, yet very real-world perspective of the Model United Nations program.

Concerning her potential as a teaching assistant, Janet has detailed experience in developing educational materials for courses. After many years of dissatisfaction with economic geography texts, I decided I would develop a laboratory manual for my introductory course. Based on Janet's superior performance in the course I employed her to put the manual together. Although we talked at length about the project and I gave her broad outlines for each segment, nonetheless the lab manual is very much her creation. It is a five-assignment workbook built around a hypothetical scenario in which the student is a staff advisor to a program officer of the Ford Foundation. The assignments require that students complete a thorough analysis of a country, including an economic history, demographic analysis, trade assessment, and policy proposal. The manual is designed such that a student will be able to retrieve the necessary quantitative and cartographic information to complete the projects. Each assignment results in a memo based on a template Janet developed. Janet identified and tested all sources listed in the manual, and this project would not have reached fruition without Janet's tireless efforts.

I know from discussions with colleagues and graduate students in my department that we all think Janet is a very special student. I have enjoyed getting to know her as a person and find her surprisingly mature for her young age, quite capable of working entirely on her own in a self-directed manner. I am pleased that Janet is planning to enroll in graduate school starting this fall. I have no doubt that she has the skills, focus, and determination to successfully complete a master's degree in a timely fashion. I also believe she will seek to complete a Ph.D.

Janet is a rare find. She is well-trained, ambitious, and yet very open-minded and even self-effacing. I believe she will be successful wherever she ends up attending graduate school. She will be a dedicated student and a competent professional.

I recommend her very highly and without reservation.

Sincerely,
Janet Teacher
Janet Teacher
Professor of Geography

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November xx, 20xx

Letter of recommendation for Janet Lerner's graduate application

Janet Lerner is the best student I have this year, and I enthusiastically support her graduate application. She is highly intelligent, works well as a team member, and has demonstrated leadership potential. I enthusiastically supported her application for the student position on the Mythic University Board of Trustees for the same reasons. She was the runner-up for that distinguished post, and Mythic University lost out on a true leader. But I believe her time is yet to come.

Janet has taken only one class with me, but we have maintained contact through discussions in my office and on the squash court. She is an excellent student—she received an A in my class and was among the top two or three students in all facets of the course. She writes well, she is very analytical, she is articulate, and she is prepared. But the A hardly did justice to her performance in my class. A major component of this class was a local government simulation. Students played a variety of roles and dealt with issues given to them in the simulation textbook and by me, as simulation leader. We spent over three weeks of class time on this activity, and it allowed me to evaluate my students' strengths and weaknesses in some depth. Janet did not simply succeed in this simulation; rather, she *owned* it. The simulation included a zoning/development problem that is intended to be virtually intractable given the assigned roles and other simulation constraints. Janet beat the simulation. Her proposals were innovative, but within the confines of the simulation rules. She developed a solution, built the necessary coalition, developed creative compromises, and worked through to the proposal's enactment.

For her ingenuity, creativity, adherence to role, and enthusiasm, she received the class award for the most valuable simulation participant. But from my perspective her contribution went beyond this performance. Through the simulation Janet helped to set a tone, to take the simulation seriously and never say "it's not real" as would many of the other students. She showed leadership within the simulation and within the class.

Reflective now about Janet's contribution to the class, I would add one more point about the simulation. Janet was also the most severe critic of its design and my operational decisions. She challenged me to keep the simulation realistic and to avoid contradictions and implausible developments. Janet is critical, perceptive, aggressive, but not overpowering. Her criticisms were honest and appropriate.

Needless to say, I would love to teach a whole class full of Janet Lerners. She will make an outstanding graduate student. She has the intellectual capacity and she has the ambition. Based on what I have seen of her in the classroom and on the squash court, she also has the drive. And she will bring to graduate school a breadth rarely seen among graduate students: She double-majored in Political Science and Art History, a combination you do not often see. She speaks easily, and unusually perceptively, about politics, sports, the university community and academia in general, and anything else that comes up.

She will be a rare catch for any graduate school, and I will watch her career develop with great interest and high expectations.

Sincerely,
Janet Teacher
Janet Teacher
Assistant Professor of Political Science

MU MYTHIC UNIVERSITY

123 Ivy Road, Mythic CA 99999   555-123-4567

OCTOBER xx, 20xx

<u>To the UCD School of Film Application Committee:</u>

Letter of Support for John Lerner's UCD Graduate Scholarship

Perhaps the most memorable discussion I've ever had with a student about his decision to switch majors was three years ago. The student was a first-year Polymer Science and Engineering major on a scholarship, taking my introductory film class as an elective, and he told me he was considering a switch to Film. Assuming that this student was simply running into typical academic problems in first-year chemistry and physics courses, I asked how those courses were going. "Oh, I'm getting As in those," he assured me with a calm wave of his hand. "But I long to study Film." That student was John Lerner.

Since that time, I've worked with John as a mentor on several of his papers for classes ranging from honors composition to film history and theory. In my seven-year career as a film instructor, no student has been more delightful to work with than has John. His papers are always creative, self-styled, skillful, and analytical. I quote from a creative essay he wrote during his first year of study, spoofing college philosophy and psychology classes by claiming that he got through them simply by peppering in quotations from Ingmar Bergman films: "When my philosophy professor asked me to explain human reactions to fear, I snapped, 'In our fear, we make an image, and that image we call God.' I got an A in the course." Later, John as a character in the essay discovers that he can arbitrarily quote Bergman films to advance his personal relationships as a college student as well, in that college is "a world full of fake intellectuals."

This is not to say that John's work is too quirky or sardonic to thrive in the traditional academic arena. Another paper he wrote for a film class on Francois Truffaut's *La Nuit Américaine* clearly demonstrates his facility with formal analysis. In this paper, John compares Truffaut's life to his art (a staple of film criticism, certainly), but he does not trot out sophomoric insights—rather he analyzes crisply and complexly, embracing principles of paradox, juxtaposition, technique. One sees John's gift for language and analytical focus from the first line of the paper: "The tap of his cane is heard before the first appearance of the boy on screen—almost an apparition of Antione Doinel—hustling down the sidewalk toward an imposing set of vertical bars." In this paper and others I've reviewed with John, it's clear that he has mastered the art of student paper writing, and he is just as comfortable with a formal analysis of film noir as he is with dropping in cultural references to vernacular English or Groucho Marx.

I turn to these examples of John's work so prominently not because I lack other kinds of evidence, but because as I read his work I am so impressed with the richness and diversity of his talents. More personally, I have had numerous opportunities to match my opinion of John's work with that of his character. I've been intrigued and moved by conversations with him about his three adopted siblings. I've spoken with his peers about the particular sensibility that he brings to discussions in his classes, and I've spoken with his other professors about him, one of whom reports that he consistently "raises the tenor of class discussion greatly." As a lover of film and a screenplay author, I have enjoyed many relaxed conversations with John about both film and script writing. As his writing mentor, I have discovered that he is willing to do complete retooling of a script that is off the mark, or that I need only briefly characterize a trend in his work for his jaunty mind to apply it to self-improvement.

In short, John is both scholarly and culturally entrenched, ambitious but not pretentious, self-deprecating yet confident, forthright but unassuming, delightfully irreverent yet appropriately respectful—a complex and whole human being. A recent discussion with him about his GPA crystallizes these traits: "I have a 3.99-something GPA," he smiled. "I got an A- in a one-credit skiing class. I'm glad, really. Took the pressure off."

Given the substantial two-year stipend of the UCD Graduate Scholarship and your express request that recommenders voice their criticisms as well as their praise, I offer a few comments in that regard. Clearly, I mean to give John Lerner the highest recommendation, but not so subjectively that my opinion of him is varnished. I have known students with more concrete long-term goals than John has, I have worked with better writers, and for all his academic accomplishment, John is still a slightly withdrawn figure and at times the best in him needs to be coaxed forth. None of these issues, though, keep me from considering him to be among the best, most admired students I have known in my teaching career—a student on par with the award of a prestigious university scholarship.

Because of John's obvious writing and scholarly talent and his proven high level of interest in film, no student I have known would be more suited to thrive at the UCD School of Film, especially with a scholarship to fund his first two years. Please do give him your considered attention.

Sincerely,
John Teacher
John Teacher, PhD
Instructor in Film Studies