

Sample Truman Scholarship Recommendation



January xx, 20xx

Dear Truman Fellowship Selection Committee:

I am pleased to recommend **Janet Lerner** for a Truman fellowship. I know Janet well: She has worked for me as a student peer advisor for the last year and she took an honors seminar from me last semester. Janet is a bright, energetic student who is passionate about issues of civil and human rights. She is a leader on campus who works well with both students and administrators. Likable and assertive, Janet will make a strong impact in her community and American politics in the years to come.

In this letter I want to focus on Janet's academics. Janet took my seminar entitled "Critical Reasoning in Politics," the first course in a sequence for our honors students who will be writing a thesis in their senior year. The course introduces students to the basics of social science research while they develop a proposal for their own thesis research project. Janet received one of four A's (in a class of 14).

Early in the semester I was concerned about how Janet would do. Often when students choose a research topic about political issues they feel strongly about they are unable to develop a satisfactory research project. They have difficulty stepping back, reading literature contrary to their views, and developing a project that can ultimately prove them wrong—a benchmark for good social science. Janet dove into exactly this sort of project.

She did an excellent job. She quickly learned what it meant to design a research project. She adopted and discarded several ideas without losing sight of her central interest. She read in a variety of literatures and framed her questions in many ways. She persevered, she read, she got frustrated, and she stuck with it. In the end she came up with what I believe will be an exceptional project on how activist groups promoting same-sex unions and marriages frame their arguments and issues across the American states. I would be happy to advise her on her senior project if she asks.

Janet's A was well-earned. She writes well, she is deeply analytical, she frames interesting and important questions, she applies literature and other arguments, and she elevates the performance of those working with her. In addition, Janet is a valuable contributor to class discussions. She pushes issues other students may be reluctant to discuss, but she does so in a way that is non-threatening and inviting.

As a White student double-majoring in African and African-American studies, and a straight woman leading a campus gay and lesbian activism group, Janet is exceptionally talented at bringing people together and seeing the world through the eyes of others. She is an important leader now and will continue to be in the future.

Sincerely,
John Teacher
John Teacher
Associate Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies

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UNIVERSITY

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

January xx, 20xx

To the Truman Committee:

I first met Janet Lerner when she approached me about joining the honors program three years ago in her first year of study. When I informed her of her options, she was undaunted by the limited time she had to rethink her schedule. Although the second semester had already begun, she approached one of her professors with a plan for doing an Honors Option. The professor, rather than complain about a somewhat late extra burden, thanked me for encouraging the student to work with her; the little post-it attached to a later recommendation said, “Good luck to her because she is wonderful! And thank you!”

As I came to know through interactions with Janet and her honors advisor, not only did Janet do independent work in Spanish literature with this professor, she also participated in a research project with her, which required her to interview senior citizens in Spanish. Both professors who directed the study were impressed with Janet’s reliability, motivation, and enthusiasm for the project and those with whom she interacted. But Janet did not see the project as a one-way relationship with those she interviewed: quite the contrary, while she surveyed her subjects, she made it a point to learn more from them than could be entered into a survey form.

Janet’s enthusiasm for her research on senior citizens reflects her commitment to public service as well as to study. In working with Spanish-speaking senior citizens about the most personal of experiences—sexual behavior and sexually transmitted diseases—she also learned about the needs of a constituency that is often neglected and an issue that has previously been defined rather narrowly. Janet’s interest in community and international understanding—together with her perfect g.p.a.—prompted me to suggest she apply to the Mythic University Honors College.

When I mentioned to Janet that she consider applying for the Honors College, she sent me her essays to look over, with a note of apology that they were not better; yet, they looked finished to me—I had no suggestions to make. She had the cleanest essays I had examined: she knew to review the Honors College web page without my prompting her, and despite her apology she had obviously made sure the essays were in the best possible form before showing them to me. The Honors College was also impressed: it accepted her, and the political science department offered her a scholarship

Before beginning her junior year, Janet would apply for and receive two competitive scholarships, one from the state, the other national: the Finnegan is a scholarship program that provides student internships for the state government; the National Security Education Program Scholarship (NSEP) funds study in Cuba. She would manage to receive and use both scholarships during the same year. I know how successful her study was in Cuba not only because I received detailed e-mail messages elaborating on her experiences, but because one of NSEP’s program advisers gave her high ratings and asked me to encourage Janet apply to be an NSEP intern.

Janet's ambitions are for her local community as well as for the state, the world, and herself. She defines community both globally and locally. As the Honors Club treasurer, she did more than keep track of club money, she initiated enriching activities and community service projects. For example, she suggested that the Honors Club attend the International Margaret Mead Film Festival at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. She found the schedule, posted it, and persuaded the club that it would be a great experience. And even I, a native New Yorker, was surprised by just how good that festival was. The directors and writers of various documentaries were there to discuss their work, and the documentaries themselves dealt with a great range of social and political issues. The first showing we attended focused on Native American orphans and foster parenting; the second on Native American fishing and logging rights in Canada. Janet also organized the Earth Day clean-up on campus and the nearby city park.

Finally, I have seen Janet in a number of unusually challenging situations. On an honors trip to Madrid, she acted as translator for students as well as for me. The hotel had no record of our reservation, nor was there a bus to pick us up at the airport after our long, all-night flight. Yet, Janet calmly did whatever I asked of her, such as make calls on the airport phones in Spanish until our problem was solved. Later in the trip, she helped make group arrangements at museums, sharing this duty with a native speaker of Spanish who was also on the trip. Most recently, she joined an honors trip to New York—she knew and performed her job on this trip: to talk to first- and second-year students about scholarships and the importance of service. In all of these examples, I came to see that Janet Lerner understands the importance of sharing—and she defines sharing broadly, embracing those nearest to her as well as those halfway around the world.

Janet has her future plans laid out: the State department, then the Senate. What's amazing and clear to me is that she possesses the energy, ability, and heart to achieve these goals, and to become the best possible public servant.

Sincerely,
Janet Teacher
Janet Teacher
Honors Coordinator
and Associate Professor of English