

REFERENCE FILES

Career Services • SUNY Potsdam • 315/267-2344
www.potsdam.edu/career

Your Reference File (REFERENCE FILES ARE MAINTAINED FOR 6 YEARS)

- **Starting a Reference File.** Complete the Reference File Release Form and return it to the Career Planning Office to establish your file. **Forms are available in the office or on our website in the Guides and Resources section.**
- **Number of Letters.** Your file should contain a maximum of 10 pages (3 to 5 letters are usually sufficient). These include reference letters from faculty, sponsor teachers, employers, and advisors (or student leaders) for campus activities. For on-campus references, we have forms available for you to give the SUNY faculty or staff member writing your reference. One form is for confidential letters and the other one preserves your right to access. These forms are available in the office or on the Career Planning website. For off-campus employers, ask for a "To Whom It May Concern" letter on their own letterhead.
- **Resumes and Transcripts.** Resumes and transcripts are NOT included in your Career Planning file. You send resumes to employers yourself, and only the Registrar maintains transcripts. You can get an unofficial transcript through BearPaws, which you may use if the employer does not ask for an "official transcript".
- **Sending/Requesting your File.** When you want your file sent to yourself, an employer or graduate school, **we require a written request (by e-mail or snail mail) with your name, address, phone, class year and the name and address of the person to whom you want the file sent** or you may print the request form available on our website, complete and mail it to Career Planning. All requests must be made in writing. We cannot respond to requests made over the telephone.
- **File Requested by an Employer.** When an employer asks us to send your file, we will send it right away.
- **Married students and Alumni.** Some, or all, of your references may be in your birth name. Advise us of both your married and birth name so we can locate your file when it is requested. It is a good idea to put your maiden name on your resume in parentheses so the employer will also make the connection. For example, Mary Westville would have Mary (Smithers) Westville on her resume

Asking Faculty for References

- Faculty have hundreds of students in different courses at different times. Writing references is something they expect to do, but it is *not* a simple task. You can help with this process.
- Don't assume that a person will write a reference for you. They may not have enough exposure to your work to write a reference. Ask if they feel they have observed you enough to feel comfortable writing a reference. If they agree to do it, be sure to thank them and send them a thank you note when you receive the letter and keep them updated on your progress. You should also ask if you might use their name and phone number if you are asked to do so by a potential employer.

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- Make your request in person. It is a good idea to give the professor a resume, a brief written statement of the courses you took from him/her, any special projects or other accomplishments involved and your career goals. If you are asking for a reference from a professor who hasn't taught you since your freshman or sophomore years, this information is important. If your goals are unclear or varied (many students have a number of different but equally important goals), mention characteristics you know will be a part of whatever career you choose. Let the Career Planning staff assist you with this. We can provide you with reference forms for faculty and staff. **Forms are also available on our website.**
- If you are planning to go to graduate school, you will have to follow the specific Reference Letter process for each school. You may want to ask if he/she would be willing to write a general letter on the Career Planning form. This is good insurance. Your plans may change for some reason and this letter could come in handy.

Asking Employers for References

- The best person to ask is usually your immediate supervisor, the person who can support her/his observations with credible examples. You may also want to *add* someone in higher authority at your place of employment.
- Some employers will not give written references. In that case, ask if your supervisor will agree to be a telephone reference for you. If he or she agrees, you can add their home and contact information on a separate sheet and submit it with your resume.
- Treat volunteer work as a job for reference purposes.