Recommendation letters are a critical component of your clerkship application. To maximize your chances of securing a clerkship, your recommendations should be enthusiastic and unqualified. Ensure that the letters you submit meet this standard by conversing frankly with the individuals you are requesting to write a reference:

**Choose faculty who know you and your work well.** Ideally, your writer should be able to discuss both your academic performance and your intellectual characteristics. If you must choose between the two (e.g., between a professor in whose class you received an A and your small section or seminar professor who knows you well but in whose course you earned a B+), consult with the professors about your dilemma. Some faculty feel comfortable writing unqualified letters for students they know well but who did not receive top grades. Others believe that, to protect their credibility with the judiciary, they must draft a more muted letter when called upon to recommend students that did not perform at the top of the class.

It is critical that you give your recommenders a reasonable amount of time to prepare your letters.

**Discuss your clerkship aspirations in detail.** Supply your writer with a resume, transcript and list of judges to whom you want to apply. Ask for your writer’s opinion about your qualifications to clerk at the courts you are considering and whether they can write a letter that they believe will help you land an interview. If your writer feels you are seeking a position for which you are not qualified, the writer will be unable to write a first-rate recommendation. A lukewarm recommendation will reduce the success of your application.

**Inquire whether there is a numerical limit on the number of letters your writer is willing to send on your behalf.** If your clerkship aspirations require that you apply broadly, discuss your reasoning with your writers. A couple of examples: if your academic credentials are borderline, you may wish to submit a large number of applications and include locations that are not universally popular. If you are committed to seeking a federal appellate clerkship, you may wish to ignore geography altogether and apply to judges throughout the country. If your writers understand and agree with your strategy, they are more likely to be supportive. If your first choice writer cannot support your application strategy, you should seek out someone who can rather than apply with less-than-stellar letters of reference.

**Finally, understand that each letter of reference is a personal communication between the writer and a member of the judiciary.** Each time you need a letter of reference, even if the letter has already been written and sent to a number of judges, you must contact the writer and request that additional letters be sent.

If you’d like to discuss the recommendation process in greater detail, please contact Lorri Olán in Career Planning (olanl@wlu.edu).