

2021 Duke Churchill Recommendations

The Churchill Scholarship is looking for serious STEM students with proven talent in research and a capacity to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the sciences, engineering, or mathematics by pursuing original, creative work at an advanced level as demonstrated by awards, prizes, research, and letters of recommendation. Applicants in the sciences and engineering will demonstrate extensive laboratory experience, internships, or other related work, while applicants in mathematics will show substantial independent work or other projects.

Additionally, Churchill scholars have outstanding academic achievement, and personal qualities. Understanding the time commitment required by research, the Churchill Foundation does not seek so-called “well rounded” applicants; instead, it seeks applicants with what we call interesting “jagged edges.” Nonetheless, it should be noted that successful applicants display a bewildering array of talents and activities outside of academic pursuits, especially in music, athletics, social service, among other activities. Duke is allowed to nominate two students annually.

NCS-OUSF Advice on writing Churchill recommendations

The Winston Churchill Foundation is looking for *exceptionally* talented STEM students. Your job as a recommender is to demonstrate through example and by comparison why your student will be a leader in their field of science and why one year at the University of Cambridge will add value to their education. The Duke Churchill process has two phases, the nomination process and the national process, the schedule on page two will outline both.

We suggest that before you begin, you reflect on how you believe the student fits the criteria of the Churchill scholarship—listed above. You may want to talk with the student about what they think you can speak about in the letter—why did they choose you?

A good letter of recommendation for the Churchill is at least one and ½ pages and typically, no more than three pages in length. Usually, we find that two pages are in most cases sufficient, but that in some cases that are well documented you may need additional space.

But, what goes into all that space? Churchill Scholars are among the best of the best young science students each year. The Churchill particularly is interested in specifics. They want you to provide evidence for your assessment of a student. They want detail on the student’s academic work: how does their performance demonstrate their intellectual ability and creativity? Compare your student to others you have known who have gone on to achieve great things. Concrete examples are important. The work that students will do at Cambridge is primarily independent research. How will this student perform in that environment? Would you recommend them to the strongest graduate program in the US in their field? Comparisons to other students, our campus environment and how your student has faced challenges in the lab or classroom are all good places to start. The best letters use anecdotes to illustrate the points you are trying to make. If you claim Johnny is brilliant—how did he perform in class relative to other students, what was brilliant about the paper he wrote, the argument he made or the experiment he proposed? If you claim that Suzy will cure cancer in her lifetime, what tendencies show that she has the perseverance to get the job done?

These are hard letters to write, but the Office of Nationally Competitive Scholarships is here to assist you—send us drafts, we are happy to look at them. In October, we will look closely at all the letters submitted and let you know if we find typos or other corrections prior to the final submission but are happy to look at drafts well in advance of the Duke deadline.

We do urge you to consider carefully before you agree to write the letter. You are not required to write for every student that asks—only those for whom you believe you can make a good case. If at any time you have questions or concerns about a student in the process, please contact either Babs Wise (babs@duke.edu) or Alexander Hartemink (amink@cs.duke.edu).

Please note: All students have waived their rights to see your letters. Additionally, it is against OUSF policy to accept letters originally authored by students. We need the letter to be from you.

Further Resources:

You may want to refer to advice from the Churchill Scholarship website: <http://bit.ly/Churchillrec>
 Strong Recommendations from Inside Higher Ed: <http://bit.ly/stronger-letters>

Process for Churchill Recommendations

Action	Comment	Date
Receive a request from a student to write a recommendation	Each student applying for the Churchill in the Spring of 2019 will have to submit one letter of recommendation to us on April 9 . The remainder of their letters will not be due to NCS until September 16, 8:00 AM .	Spring/ Summer 2021
Decide whether or not you are able to write the letter	Students should supply you with a resume, a conversation about what they are applying for and why, and papers they have written for you. YOU make the decision on whether or not you have the time to help the student's application or not.	ASAP
Write the recommendation and submit to ncs-ousf@duke.edu	The May letter is to give us a sense of how the student will fare in the national competition. The October letter should be a polished draft for the national competition on letterhead.	April 9 or September 16
Recommendation Revisions	Students will notify you in early October whether or not the University has nominated them. NCS will notify you if we found typos or have questions about your letter.	October 28
Final Deadline	OUSF must submit all the nominated students' materials including your letter directly to the foundation	November 1
Final Selection of Churchill Scholars		January