

WRITING WINNING NOMINATIONS

REFLECTIONS ON SUCCESSFUL ACADEMIC AWARD NOMINATIONS

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Nominating a colleague for an academic award is a major undertaking, whether it is the OCUFA Academic Librarianship or Teaching Award, a university-based recognition award, a 3M National Teaching Fellowship, or a similar such recognition. Each award has a list of criteria, but lack of specificity in the terms for the award is seldom the problem. The attributes of the candidate are often stellar. So why was your candidate unsuccessful? The reason may lie in the care taken by the nominator to present a strong case in the format and manner specified by the call for nominations. This brief article will provide some guidelines for strengthening your application on behalf of a candidate colleague.

The most obvious advice, to read the award guidelines, is not always followed. For example, the OCUFA guidelines speak to the value of the nominator's brief, a summary and persuasive commentary on the evidence at hand. Nonetheless, over the years I have seen nominators' briefs as concise as one and a half pages, written in too-general terms and frequently insufficiently persuasive in making the case for their candidate. The nominator's brief is the document which the committee will likely spend the most time reading, and on which they will largely base their decision. Do not confuse a cover letter with the nominator's brief. A nomination brief takes time to write. It is not the product of a half hour squeezed in between classes or other commitments, but rather should be the well written testimony of a colleague who has amassed, digested and reflected upon the evidence in support of their candidate. A well written nomination brief is not tediously lengthy, but neither should it be so concise that it fails to perform the function for which it is intended: to "comprehensively

explained circumstances will it [the committee] accept copies of material taken from promotion and tenure files or collected for other awards.”

Is it worth all the time and effort required to prepare a good nomination? Absolutely! As someone who has had the privilege of reading hundreds of nominations, I am encouraged to see the superior quality of teaching and academic librarianship at Ontario universities. I urge faculty and librarians to take the time to nominate the work of their colleagues. While the OCUFA award recognizes cumulative contributions of faculty or librarians, not all recipients are nearing retirement. Indeed, many are mid-career, contributing to the advancement of teaching through their scholarship and day-to-day interaction with students in and out of the classroom. Teaching everything from anthropology to zoology, or playing key roles as academic librarians, there are colleagues to be celebrated. Let's do it!

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