

HDFS Award Recipient Best Practices

Congratulations on your HDFS award! As an HDFS award recipient you join an honored group. For this academic year you hold this honor and the monetary support that comes with it. Always remember that you represent the Human Development and Family Studies department, the College of Social Science, and Michigan State University. Please read and review this list of best practices, intended to encourage your professional development.

Thank You Letters

All award recipients are required to acknowledge the hard work and generosity behind the scholarship/award. This is not only a moment to thank the donor(s) and department chair, but an opportunity to practice your professional writing skills. Letters can be submitted via email to Dr. Guinot Talbot (guinotam@hdfs.msu.edu).

- Award recipients are required to submit a letter of acceptance of the award and a **thank you letter to the donor(s) within two weeks of notification** of the decision in order to receive the award. Remember, it is through the generosity of these dedicated donors that HDFS is able to support undergraduate scholarship.
- Award recipients in addition to the thank you letter to the donor(s) should write a thank you letter to the chair of the Human Development and Family Studies department. The department chair takes time to review applications and the recommendations made by the undergraduate education committee, and personally approves each scholarship.
- Format all thank you letters professionally, remember you are writing as a professional, representing the HDFS department, and most importantly taking time to acknowledge the generosity of the donor(s). See general formatting tips below.
 - Double and triple check the document for spelling and grammar errors. The final copy should be free from all errors.
 - Express your gratitude for the gift and enthusiasm for what the gift allows you to do or pursue.
 - Describe to the donor(s) who you are, what you are studying, and your future plans.
 - Sincerely reflect on what this gift means and how it helps your continued education.
 - Type each note using standard format (12 point font, one inch margins, double spaced paragraphs).
 - Structure of the letter:
 - **Informational Header (left aligned, each on a separate line):** *Date, Donor(s) name or Name of Organization, Name of Scholarship*
 - **Salutation (left aligned, separate line):** *Dear [Donor(s) Name or Organization Name],*
 - **First Paragraph (flush left/ragged right):** *State the purpose the letter— address the donor(s) and the award received.*
 - **Second Paragraph (flush left/ragged right):** *Share about yourself and what this award means to your continued studies.*
 - **Third Paragraph (flush left/ragged right):** *Repeat statement of gratitude and what the donor(s) investment will be used for.*

- **Complimentary Close (left aligned, each on a separate line):** *Sincerely, [Sign your name here], [Type your name], [Your address], [City, State, Zip]*

(Adapted from Fresno State Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships)

Conference Travel and Presentations

Conference travel and presentations offer opportunities for growth outside of the classroom. Through these experiences you are able to network with other professionals and programs, continue your professional develop, and add value to your resume.

- If you have received scholarship funds to support your presentation at a conference or professional meeting, upon your return, you will be **required** to turn in a copy of your presentation (e.g., lecture, poster) via *PowerPoint* or *PDF* to Dr. Guinot Talbot (guinotam@hdfs.msu.edu; HE room 14) and make arrangements with Dr. Guinot Talbot to present your work to the HDFS faculty.
- For conference travel please contact Dr. Guinot Talbot (guinotam@hdfs.msu.edu) to obtain Human Development and Family Studies business cards to use while networking. Networking is a powerful way to make lasting connections and often provides opportunities beyond your course of study. It is something you want to be in the habit of doing throughout your time at MSU, and attending/presenting at a conference offers great practice!
- For all presentations inside of the HDFS department as well as outside remember to dress professionally. This is your chance to make an impression on prospective graduate programs, prospective employers, and future colleagues. You are representing yourself as a professional, the HDFS department, the College, and University.
- Consider joining a professional association. The conference you are attending or presenting at may represent a professional association that aligns with your interests and future career goals. Often professional associations offer student rates for their membership, taking advantage of these rates while in school allows you to: (a) participate in the organization, (b) keep up-to-date on research and publications, and (c) promote on your resume.

Obtaining Letters of Recommendation

Throughout your undergraduate career instances will arise necessitating a letter of recommendation from a faculty member, course instructor, or advisor in the department. Your approach to this process will dictate the quality of your learning experience and professional development, and the quality of the letter that is written on your behalf. There are three crucial components to this process: (a) choosing the right recommender, someone who can attest to your work inside and outside of the classroom, who knows you and your work ethic; (b) providing your recommender with the information and resources necessary to write a thorough letter; and (c) appropriately timing your request, give plenty of time to meet with your recommender and have the letter drafted and submitted.

- Remember that when you are asking for a letter of recommendation you are asking the recommender to put forth considerable effort, they need to take time out of their schedule to complete this request. To help facilitate this process you will need to provide the recommender information on yourself and your work. It is a common practice to send your recommender, at minimum, a bulleted list of your experiences that you would like highlighted in the letter. This helps

streamline the process for the recommender, helps to update the recommender on your work, and provides information that will strengthen the letter.

- Another important document to provide your recommender is your updated resume/vitae (see the section Update Your Resume below). This is an additional document that will help your recommender know who you are and what you have done. Information in this document can be used in crafting a compelling letter.
- Be prepared to waive your rights to reading the letter of recommendation. This option is available with most applications and letters of recommendation. Often this is the preference of the recommender, to send a confidential letter. This is a very common practice, which allows the recommender to speak candidly about you and your work.
- Be prepared to complete a “Release of Information Authorization Form.” In accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) students are required to provide written permission to the recommender to release information pertaining to their educational records. On this form you specify what information the recommender can release, to whom, for what purpose, and for what period of time. This protects both you and the recommender. You can locate this form at <https://reg.msu.edu/read/ReleaseofInformationAuthorizationform.pdf>
- Make sure that you thank all of your recommenders. It is important to acknowledge the time and energy given to help further you and your career. This thank you should be sent in a timely manner, one to two weeks after the letter is submitted. Remember, a good letter of recommendation could be the deciding factor in the decision making process.

Update Your Resume

Your resume is a powerful tool helping you communicate your knowledge, skills, and experiences to others. This is a living document that must be revisited and consistently updated. Receiving a departmental scholarship is something that you will want to add to your resume. The scholarship you have received is a good example of your hard work and achievement.

- For help with your resume and connection to *Handshake*, the MSU career management system, see the MSU Career Services Network (<https://careernetwork.msu.edu/>). The Career Services Network also offers resources for exploring your options for a major/career, creating resumes/cover letters/thank you letters/applying to graduate school, workshops and career fairs, and other “how to” resources (e.g., finding a internship or job).
- For example resumes and cover letters see the MSU Career Passport. You can locate the Career Passport electronically at <https://careernetwork.msu.edu/files/PDF/career-passport-2016/Passport%20Passport%202016%20petite.pdf> **OR** <https://careernetwork.msu.edu/resources-tools/career-guides.html> **OR** stop by the HDFS Undergraduate Affairs Office (HE room 14) to pick up a hard copy.

Connect to the Human Development and Family Studies Department

As a scholarship award recipient you are considered a leader in the department. If you haven't already, consider ways to further connect to the department through our undergraduate student organization, social media outlets, and keeping in touch with the Undergraduate Affairs Office and Undergraduate Director.

- *HDFS Helping Hands* is student lead organization that offers a place to network, participate in governance, and engage in community volunteering.
- Connect with the department on social media. Here, you can read about the latest activities, awards, research projects, and publications coming out of the department.
 - Website: <http://hdfs.msu.edu/undergraduate>
 - LinkedIn: *HDFS Alumni-Michigan State University*
 - Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MSUHDFS>
 - Twitter: *@MSUHDFS*
- We know HDFS students are engaging in many wonderful pursuits inside the classroom as well as outside. Please inform the undergraduate director (guinotam@hdfs.msu.edu) of what you are doing (e.g., internships, projects within class, volunteer experiences, research, presentations). We want to know the awesome things our students are doing and be able to tell the world through social media!