The counselor recommendation

Megan McClelland, Petaluma High School
David Rion, Sonoma Academy
By the numbers...

David-- 40 seniors per year, 40 letters needed

90% of them needed by November 1

Megan-- 90 seniors on caseload this school year, 325 seniors total, 20-30 letters/counselor (deadlines ranged from November - February)

40% attend 4 year colleges
Goals of Session

- Intro & Caseload
- How are letters used?
- Process
- Examples
- Q&A
How do admissions offices use them?

Context for weaknesses in application: Mono/divorce hurt grades in 10th? Schedule make 4th year of math impossible to fit?

Context for strengths in application: First to double up in languages? Overcame adversity to still get A’s?

Picture of personality, activities, passions, place within the school community.

Way to differentiate: Who is raved about, who is tepid praise?
Process: David

What do I use?

- Transcript
- Lengthy student survey
- Parent report
- Meeting notes
- Notes from meetings with Student Life, Athletic Director
- Notes from full class appreciation circle
- Quarterly teacher comments
- Peer recommendation (no longer use)
Process: David

Writing the recommendation:

- About one write at home day per week in the fall
- Write 4-5 recs per home day (about an hour- hour and a half each)
- Significant outline, pulling together of quotes first
- First paragraph hardest, most important. Academic and extracurricular paragraphs somewhat write themselves.
- Tend to be 600-750 words, I don’t revise significantly.
Process: Megan

- One on one conferences - junior and senior year
- Senior letter of rec packet
  - Teacher feedback (3 teachers)
  - Parent brag sheet
  - Student Questions & Resume
- List of colleges applying to
- Counseling notes from the past few years
1. What career do you want to pursue and why does it appeal to you?

2. What aspect of college are you most looking forward to?

3. List 3 adjectives that best describe you:

4. Which accomplishments occurring in the last 3 years are you most proud of and why:

5. Has anything interfered with your academic performance or have you faced a significant obstacle/circumstance you have faced and the skills you used to deal with it, including what you learned about yourself.
6. How have you demonstrated leadership in your extracurricular activities during your high school years? How has your leadership impacted others around you? If it resulted in a change at PHS or in the community, please tell how it made a difference.

7. If you had a personal motto to live by, what would it be? Why?

8. Describe the best advice you have ever received and how it relates to you.

9. Describe any summer programs you have been a part of.
Format:

- Distinctive Qualities - share any anecdotes
- Academic History - anything that would not be seen on transcript - growth/progress, comparison with others
- Activities/Interests/Areas of Impact
- Student Self Reflection - overall opinion
Opening examples

I want to be John Smith when I grow up. John is something else. He is jovial, wildly bright, and intellectually argumentative in the best of ways. People have described him to me as ‘a smart little old man’, ‘a teddy bear’, and ‘a hugger’. John is a force in the classroom and the debate stage. He loves deep conversations, and will eagerly fall down any internet research rabbit hole. If I needed a Trivial Pursuit teammate from anyone in my 6 years at Sonoma Academy it would be John. Mostly because he knows everything about everything, but also just because he’s one of the most fun students I’ve met. I’d be remiss if I didn’t mention his puns. John’s humor is omnipresent at SA, and it’s the most delightfully corny humor—a welcome antidote from the snark most of his peers pass off as humor. John is universally loved at SA, and will be greatly missed. I enthusiastically recommend him to you.
Opening Examples

Perry is a shooting star of talent and gusto. She’s a campus favorite, with a charisma that creates its own gravitational pull. Quirky, unafraid, headstrong, and hilarious, Perry lives with a passion for life and has gained the admiration of our entire school. She’s a curious learner who brightens the classroom and is an immensely talented actress and playwright. Perry is light and joyful, and yet also possesses a tenaciousness and willingness to take on hard work, which is admirable. She first learned this in writing plays; talent only gets you half of the way there. The other half is work, work, revise, work. This blend of creativity, charisma and work ethic isn’t one that comes around often, and it’s been a joy watching Perry for the last four years. She’ll leave a giant hole in our community when she leaves, and I enthusiastically recommend her to you.
Megan Example

Madeline prides herself on being honest, friendly, and a good listener, all of these qualities show in school and in her various extracurricular activities. She has good time management skills, is organized, and is always good about seeking help – she is a great self-advocate. Due to all of these qualities, I have full confidence in Madeline continuing her journey into college and being extremely successful. She is the kind of student that any college campus would be lucky to have and I recommend her enthusiastically to any school. She has been a pleasure to have as a student for the past three years and I look forward to hearing about her bright future! Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.
Resources/Q&A

Petaluma High School Letter of Rec Example:


Questions??