Guidelines for Diversity Fellowship Nomination Letters

1. Review successful nomination letters including the sample letters included herein as well as the ones in your department files.

2. Assign letter writers comfortably ahead of the due date.

3. Demonstrate financial and academic departmental support for the diversity candidate.

4. Append more than one signature on the letter including that of the equity advisor and the head graduate mentor.

5. Address how the student enhances diversity in the field and the department. State upfront his or her ethnic background and hint to his/her socio-economic status.

6. Highlight academic strengths selectively such as GPA. Mention if there is improvement over time. Mention GRE only if the score is exceptional, otherwise leave it out since it is not required in the review process.

7. Emphasize how rare it is for, say, African American students, to be drawn to history or linguistics. Include statistics if available to back up your demographic analysis in your field.

8. Remember that students receive both merit-based and diversity-based points in the evaluation process. Discuss anything you can glean from the personal history statement that addresses the challenges they’ve overcome, an accounting of the work they did in terms of servicing the underserved, and the promise of what they will do to give back to underserved communities in the future.

9. Keep in mind that Graduate Diversity Directors can assist in either gleaning more materials for the letter or reviewing it prior to submission.
Sample Nomination Letters for Diversity Fellowship

Sample Letter 1

The Department of XXX enthusiastically nominates XXX for a University Diversity Fellowship. XXX is an African American student who grew up in a large housing project in the Bronx. XXX cares about using his education to “contribute to a new way of attacking poverty.”

XXX graduated from Cornell (GPA 3.9; Quantitative GRE 800) [the review committee does not require GREs but in this instance it does not hurt to mention it], and he attended the AEA Summer Economics Program for Minority Students. After graduating from Cornell, XXX worked at the Brookings Institute as a research assistant and then at the Department of Transportation as a research analyst. In college and at work, XXX’s talent has shined and his mentors write glowingly of his promise as an economist who can make a difference. His research experiences both at Cornell and in his jobs demonstrate his talent for first-rate research.

Prof. XXX, his research advisor at Cornell, writes of XXX’s childhood struggles to get a good education, and writes XXX is “determined to help other disadvantaged youths gain the same opportunity.” XXX describes how XXX founded a program at Cornell to provide SAT preparation for Ithaca youths from disadvantaged backgrounds, and how this program raised their test scores by an average of 100 points. Prof. XXX discusses how XXX strengthened his resolve to attend graduate school after working in Washington, DC. Prof. XXX writes, “He is a remarkable young man and I recommend him to you in the absolute strongest possible terms.”

Prof. XXX at Duke, who runs the AEA Summer Minority Program and has extraordinary ability to judge how well students will do in graduate school, writes, “It is impossible to get to know XXX without being deeply impressed and somewhat awed.” Prof. XXX writes that XXX’s “keys to success are a very strong analytical ability, an incredible work ethic and organizational skills, and solid mathematics skills and background.”

In order to prepare for graduate school, XXX began taking graduate statistics courses at George Mason University. One of his statistics teachers, Prof. XXX, writes that XXX has “distinguished himself as one of the top students in the class, performing more at the level of the PhD students than the MS students” and “is a very talented and promising young man.”

Dr. XXX, for whom he worked at Brookings, compares XXX to Princeton and MIT PhD students and writes, “[H]e has in my opinion the intellect, dedication, and entrepreneurial spirit to make contributions comparable to student in these cohorts both during the graduate program and in his subsequent career.”
XXX will make an important contribution to the intellectual life at UC Berkeley with his intelligence, life experiences, and commitment to learning rigorous analysis to help solve the pressing problem of poverty in the U.S. With so few African-Americans in the Economics profession, XXX will bring a fresh set of experiences and outlook to the entire profession. His experience of growing up in poverty with a single mother in a public housing project combined with his determination to use his education to help others in this situation will bring benefit to both the profession and to society. The Department believes we would be very fortunate to entice XXX to attend Berkeley, and hope a Diversity Fellowship will help make this possible.
Sample Letter 2

The Department of Economics enthusiastically nominates XXX for a University Diversity Fellowship. An African American who was born in New York, XXX has a stellar record at Stanford (GPA 3.97 after two years; Quantitative GRE 790) in his double major in Economics and Math. XXX writes that he is “interested in education inequality, income inequality, and the interaction between them” and says this area is appealing because of the need for “compelling policy changes.”

XXX has already undertaken sophisticated first-rate research on race-related topics with several professors, including two of his letter writers. For his honors thesis, XXX examined “own-race teacher effects” (i.e., effect of students benefiting from having a teacher with the same racial background). Prof. XXX, his honors thesis advisor, describes in detail XXX’s clever and complex empirical strategy. In her evaluation of his potential, XXX writes that in her fifteen years on the faculty at Harvard and Stanford, she has had only one student whom she would recommend as strongly as XXX, and that student is now on the Princeton faculty. XXX writes, “XXX is simply as good a candidate for Ph.D. programs in economics as are produced, period. He is very intelligent and very well prepared...More importantly, he simply has the gift of economic understanding, something that many excellent students do not. He has a highly sophisticated mind, is very productive and efficient, and is brimming with ideas about research.”

Prof. XXX writes with pleasure that XXX “should be admitted to all the top programs”. He describes XXX’s research achievements: the two research papers that XXX had co-authored already, the two research papers he is writing (including his honors thesis), and his work on Prof. XXX’s charter school project. XXX states, “As you can see from his transcript, he also has plenty of intellectual firepower.”

Prof. XXX with whom XXX co-authored a published paper, wrote, “He is the most promising undergraduate that I have ever encountered.” Prof. XXX describes XXX as coming “from a distinguished academic family”, which in many ways makes XXX’s sensitivity to race and its impact on students even more remarkable.

XXX is extremely articulate in his descriptions of how being African American has affected his own experiences, especially as a student at Stanford, and how these experiences have influenced his aspirations and goals. His interest in professors as role models and the “dearth of black teachers in the schools I’ve attended” led him to think “this under-representation proves problematic for university students.” He tells a moving story about his experience in a freshman seminar about America’s welfare system. XXX writes, “I asked my professor a question regarding discrimination in the location of subsidized housing. I knew such discrimination existed.” He then describes an example of the discrimination in action in his hometown. XXX continues, “My professor, a top expert on California’s welfare system, dismissed my question, claiming that no such housing discrimination
existed. It is difficult to study problems with faculty that don’t acknowledge their existence.”

At Stanford XXX was a founding member of the Black Men’s Forum, which included professors, university students, and local high school students. Their group had trouble finding faculty members. XXX’s experience has resulted in his wanting to help fill this gap and “become a professor that students of marginalized backgrounds feel comfortable approaching.”

We agree with Prof. XXX that “XXX is a future star of the profession.” Equally important is his goal of being a role model and mentor for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and underrepresented groups. We also agree with his letter writers that XXX will be pursued by all the top departments, and we hope that with a Diversity Fellowship we can entice him to Berkeley, where we have been able in recent years to attract other talented African-American graduate students with Diversity Fellowships. We believe that XXX will be attracted to Berkeley because of our reputation for having a diverse graduate student body, and this is a small start to helping the Economics profession include more African American faculty at top universities.
Sample Letter 3

The Department of Economics enthusiastically nominates XXX for a University Diversity Fellowship. An African American who was born in XXX, has a stellar record at Yale (GPA 3.94; Quantitative GRE 800) in his double major in Economics and Math. XXX writes that his interest in development economics began in high school when he travelled to Brazil and China and “saw the huge differences in development and quality of life that exist across countries.” Then as he began taking economics classes at Yale and as the current crisis developed, his interests expanded to other areas, including the role of financial markets in the macro economy.

Prof. XXX, for whom XXX worked as a GSR, describes XXX as “a truly outstanding candidate” who “has the intelligence, creativity and discipline to excel in the very best graduate programs in the country.” Prof. XXX was pleased when XXX chose an internship at the Chicago Fed while many of his classmates were scrambling for internships on Wall Street. While working as a summer intern at the Chicago Federal Reserve Bank, XXX worked on a project involving the mortgage market, and this led him to focus on mortgage and housing-related issues in his senior thesis.

Another Yale professor, XXX, had XXX in the first year PhD econometrics course, where XXX performed exceptionally well. XXX writes, “I cannot think of any undergraduate (from any year) who has done as well as he did” in this PhD econometrics course. Prof. XXX “was impressed by the creativity he showed in the course final exam” where on a question with no correct answer, XXX “took a novel approach and got quite far with it”...which “augurs well for his potential to do original work in research.”

XXX spent his junior year abroad at the London School of Economics, where Prof. XXX had XXX in his math class “Optimisation Theory”. XXX writes that XXX received “the best result ever scored for the course in the five years I taught it.” He describes XXX as “a friendly and serious student, with whom it is easy to communicate” and “one of the best students I have ever encountered at the LSE.”

XXX understands that he is fortunate to have been the child of two PhD economists “who instilled in me that school matters” and who supported his educational path. While grateful for being middle class, XXX has enormous insight into the role of race in his own and others’ lives. He states, “I identify as black”, and describes the complex and subtle role that race plays as he writes, “my own experiences have left me with an awareness of the complex relationship between race and social class, and of the difficulties that come from trying to reduce this relationship to a one-dimensional racial or class spectrum.” His experience has made him aware of the need to interpret statistical results based upon labels carefully, and XXX writes “my background makes me very aware of the distance between model and reality, and thus of the limits of economic models in a number of
contexts. This awareness is probably the most significant way in which my background has influenced my perspective on economics.”

XXX is an extraordinary person who will make an important contribution to the diversity and intellectual life at UC Berkeley with his intelligence, experiences, and academic preparation. We agree with his letter writers that XXX will have his choice of top graduate programs. In 2005, according to the National Science Foundation, there were only 10 doctorates awarded to African Americans in Economics as compared to 385 Caucasian students earning Ph.D.s in the same year. The Department believes we would be very fortunate to entice XXX to attend Berkeley, and hope a Diversity Fellowship will help make that possible.