

How to Write an Effective Scholarship Essay

APRIL SEEHAFFER: All right, we will go ahead and get started. My name is April Seehafer. And I'm the director of the Distinguished Scholarships Program here at Washington State University. Before we begin with our workshop, which is writing effective scholarship essays, I want to tell you a little bit about the Distinguished Scholarships Program. We work with all students from all majors in all locations.

So I am delighted that there are some folks from Pullman here today. I'm also delighted that there are students from our Global Campus who are online and hopefully have lots of questions that I can help with as well. Again, my office works with students in all majors in all physical locations. So for example, this last summer, I worked with students who were applying for a variety of scholarships.

Several were in Pullman, but I also had a student who was in Senegal, Africa. And we skyped back and forth. I had another student who is teaching English as a second language in China. And so we did most of that work via email. I also had students in Vancouver and Seattle. So we're equipped in lots of ways to support students wherever they happen to be.

I also tell the Pullman students that just because you're not in Pullman during the summer doesn't mean you can't come in and still connect with our office in those ways. So we're more than happy to help in lots of ways. What my office does is we assist students in applying for nationally competitive prestigious scholarships.

So when we say Distinguished Scholarships, typically, we're talking about some of those named organizations where you are competing, not just with students from your hometown, not just with students from your academic major, not just with students from your University College or from Washington State University. You are actually competing with students from across the nation and potentially across the globe for scholarships like the Fulbright, the Rhodes, Marshall, Mitchell, Goldwater, some of those named prestigious awards.

And if you have questions about those, I have postcards for those who are here. And I have my contact information on the last slide that we're going to be going through for you students who are online. And I'd be more than happy to connect with you if you're looking at some awards. These are definitely applications that are multi-step that are a process. And so starting early in the process is the way to go.

So if you're thinking about something after graduation and you're a junior right now, actually now is really a good time for us to connect. If you're thinking about-- if you're a STEM student and you want to apply for a Goldwater, you apply as a sophomore or as a junior for a Goldwater. So we love to connect with freshmen in my office to make sure that they're on the right path to be competitive for these kinds of awards.

I'm going to go a little bit more broad today, because I know lots of you are here to just kind of learn the basics of scholarship writing. It will cover some of the things that are on the WSU scholarship application. But it's not specific to that. I also think you're going to see a couple of my slides and think to yourself, I'm pretty sure I could have thought that myself. But what we want to do is have you have that information right in front of you as you are filling out the scholarship application.

And that's where students don't make those connections. They sit down at the computer. They write their essay. They hit Submit, and that's the end of it, as opposed to being methodical, going through each step, and thinking about what they're writing and what they're sharing instead of just answering the questions and then sending it off. So we want to kind of think through, first of all, what are the key components of a scholarship application. What are some of those things that, as you're seeing, what are the things that are on your applications right now that you're filling out?

AUDIENCE: Personal statements.

APRIL SEEHAFFER: Personal statement, exactly. And the personal statement really can run the gamut between you have 150 words to you have 500 words. Or we are going to give you a certain number of characters. So personal statement is one. And that's what we're going to spend the bulk of our time on today. But I will say, there's typically a section about honors and other awards. This is an important piece, particularly for the Distinguished Scholarships that I work with, because it shows that students are a good investment.

So if you're able to say, I was nominated for this award, or I earned this \$500 scholarship, that might make that scholarship foundation think, ooh, they're a great candidate for our \$2000 scholarship. And we see that often with scholarships is that they'll sort of start to build on each other. Sometimes that is taken into account. And sometimes it's not. But it's good to make sure that you are filling that section out and that you're not leaving any-- no stone unturned.

Another piece, obviously, are transcripts. Transcripts are a concrete record of your academic performance. Maybe there are some things that are going on with your transcript that you want to address. That might be something you put into your personal statement. But there's not really much you can do to change that in terms of when you submit the actual transcript and it gets reviewed by a scholarship foundation or a reviewer.

Also in the application packet, sometimes letters of recommendation. There certainly are scholarships that don't require letters of recommendation. I work with a couple of Distinguished Scholarships that don't require letters of recommendation. But if we have time, we're going to hit on a few of those topics as well. And then there's sometimes a statement of grant purpose or a research essay. But that's a little bit more in-depth.

Overall, strong personal statements have three core elements. As a writer, looking at those core elements, you need to share your goals, connect those goals to the opportunity for which

you are applying, and share your background. So let's dive into that a little bit. So sharing your goals, readers are looking to invest in you, again, as an applicant.

They're saying I have 30, I have 3,000 applications in front of me, and I need to pick one or I need to pick two. Why are you the right person? So you have to share what you want to do and how this scholarship might help you get there.

It needs to connect or resonate with the scholarship reader so that they understand you have a plan, You have a path that you're moving forward on, and they're not just going to give you this money because you need it today but aren't going to do anything useful with it tomorrow or the next day. That's not going to be effective. So they want to know you have that plan. And they want to know what your goals are as you move forward.

This is kind of a light little joke. But I tell students sometimes, if you're applying for a scholarship with your credit union, don't talk about how great banks are. You want to match your examples that you're sharing with the entity that is funding the scholarship. If they are funding a scholarship-- so I just mentioned Goldwater, which again is a STEM-based award for students who are going to get a PhD in a STEM-related field.

We're not really all that excited about finding out about your public service unless it's related to STEM for that specific scholarship. So tailor your scholarship application to the agency and to the readers who will be reviewing it.

And of course, you need to share your background. The readers need to know about your life experiences. They need to know who you are, where you have been, and, again that piece where we talked about just a minute ago, where you're going so that they can say, oh. Everything that this student has done so far has led up to this, and I can see them taking the next logical steps to move forward. So sharing your background, that's a big piece.

I do always like to share this. I have a little YouTube video that I'm going to test my technological skills and see if I can get to it. Before I click on that though, I do want you to understand, when you're writing a personal statement, you have to tell a story. You cannot just say, this is who I am. This is what I've done. So I'm going to pause for just a second.

Are any of you familiar with Studio C? It's sort of like an SNL but maybe a very cleaned up version maybe is the way. My 14-year-old daughter has watched lots of episodes and showed me this one. And I thought, oh, my gosh! This feels kind of appropriate. So we're just going to watch a couple of minutes of it. And then discuss once we get through it.

You say, oh, I hadn't really thought of that connection before. The story that I'm telling maybe may have the same baseline kinds of experiences that someone else is telling. But it's all in the details. It's all in the story that's coming around it. I did a workshop yesterday with a group of students. And I had them write down three words to describe themselves. And then we went

around and shared some of those words. And you don't have to do this at this point in time or on your papers or anything.

But overwhelmingly-- so again, there are about 45 students in the room. And a student said, oh, one of the words I would use to describe myself is persistent. And I said, OK, how many other people wrote that down as well? And I had nine other people raise their hands. I said, OK, give me another example of a word. Someone had said, hardworking. All right, who else said hardworking? A couple of other students raised their hands.

And when you think about those words that you're using to describe yourself, it's very likely that you are using the same kinds of words to describe yourself. It's not so much the experience. It's how you're telling me that story though, how you are filling in with anecdotes that's going to make me understand what your persistence meant or what it means for you to be a hard worker, and how that then is going to resonate with me as a reader.

So I always just like that little part because I think, oh, gosh, Star Wars and Harry Potter. When you break it down, you're like, those are some very similar themes happening here. But those are not the same stories at all. And that's what we want to get to when we get to your personal statements.

Just a word of advice from the get-go though. It should not rehash your resume. In most cases, when you fill out a scholarship application, the application will have a part where you get to write your jobs or your other activities. Or you get too attached your resume to this. Resume, in my world, feels a lot like the what. Here's what I did.

When you're telling your personal statement, that's the why. Here's why I did it. Here's why I was compelled to mail 1,400 letters to this congressional representative. Or here's why-- on the resume, it might say that you were the fundraising chair for an organization. In the personal statement, I want to know why you gave your time to that organization. What about its values matched with yours? Does that make sense there?

OK, so in a personal statement, I don't want to-- I call it a grocery list. I did this, I did this, I did this, I did this-- because, 1, I've already read that. And you're not giving me anything new in your information. And 2, you're just telling me what you did, not telling me anything more about who you are and why it's important. The way to get to why it's important are those anecdotes.

How you share a specific slice of your experience helps me to understand where you're coming from. It often helps put me in the room with you, which is always a great thing when you're writing to have an experience. As a reader of scholarship applications, if I am visualizing myself right there in the room with the student as they're doing something, you've started to win me over pretty quickly. I did this, I did this, I did this doesn't win me over. But some of those details do, and we're going to do that in just a second.

So I've got some examples first. I interned in DC. That's a resume kind of a thing. Why isn't that just on your resume? So that's not a great-- you're not telling me really anything new. You're not providing me with fresh information. Here's a little bit more enhanced version. I learned a lot about government working in DC last summer. That's OK. I mean, that, at least, is giving me a little bit more about what you were doing.

In the first sentence, I don't know if you interned with the DC metro system or if you interned with a representative or a political action committee or a lobbyist or where you were. So now, I start to see, oh, a little bit more. We stayed awake far into the night, making coffee every hour and scouring budget amendments. I begin to see how much the Senate needs youth.

Ooh, I'm a little bit more in that room. I like my coffee. I want to have this vision of public servants who are scouring budget amendments and trying to understand what's happening with the budget. Now, suddenly, I'm a little bit more on board. And I'm more interested in continuing reading your application. I've got a couple of more examples.

My family was a big influence on me. I don't know that there's a person who couldn't write this, whether for good or for bad. So that's not giving me anything new. I saw how hard my family worked to ensure I did well in school. It's a little bit closer. It's talking a little bit about motivation. It's talking a little bit about maybe your experiences with your upbringing.

My mom used to pass out math worksheets to keep me occupied on a long drive to see grandma. And when I would get there, grandma would grade them. Well, if I'm going to read this, also I'm thinking, oh, grandma is probably not who I want to cross-- no. But again, now you're starting to put yourself in the car with the student. You're starting to see their development. You're starting to see where they're going.

I really grew from my time abroad. I ate all of the food abroad. And so now, I'm not fitting into my pants. That's where I grew? No, that's not helping me. Ooh, I became more independent by living alone in Hungary. All right, now I'm starting to see a little bit more. This one again. I knew my time in Budapest had changed me when I found myself helping Americans navigate the Munich subway during a weekend trip.

Oh, my gosh. You don't have to tell me you became independent, because I'm seeing how you are independent and of service to others. You don't have to tell me that this was a growth experience for you, because not only did you go to Hungary and spend this time in Budapest. Then you're taking weekend trips to other countries, and you're helping other people navigate that. Now, again, I'm more excited to keep reading and more interested about what you're telling me. And I'm starting to visualize who you are in my head.

So let's pull out a piece of paper or computer, whichever you want. I would like everyone who's also online, I want you to write the bad sentence, which is I'm a blank major. So I'm an English major. I'm a genetics major. [MUSIC PLAYING] Do you mind? What's your name?

JULIANA: Juliana.

APRIL SEEHAFFER: Juliana, I'm April. Glad you came today. Read me your bad one first.

JULIANA: I'm an agricultural and food business economics major.

APRIL SEEHAFFER: OK. Now, read me your better or-- if you didn't do bland, read me your better one.

JULIANA: OK. My major, agricultural and food business economics gives me a blend of the necessary education for my hopes of owning a dairy farm.

APRIL SEEHAFFER: Ooh, OK. It helps me understand what you're doing and why you're doing it. It's made me a little better understand the goals. And do you have experience working with a dairy farmer. Oh, so I would assume-- you grew up on?

JULIANA: Yeah.

APRIL SEEHAFFER: OK, so I assume then what we would then probably lead into is a little bit of talking about the dairy farm. And maybe even talking about the unique experiences that you might have had growing up on a dairy farm, because that is not necessarily everyone's jam. Anyone else? But do you see what she did there? She tied the major to the specific activities. And then you can start to see an opening. You can start to see where you can take this next.

And you can search to then-- I mean, in my head, I'm already thinking, oh, we could write all sorts of late at night probably having to go out and tend to animals or experiences that you have showing different animals. And so that then gives you lots of those sort of just the meat of the details that we're looking for as we're reading. Because then I want to continue reading. I have to tell you, agriculture-- tell me the full name of it again.

JULIANA: Agricultural and food business economics.

APRIL SEEHAFFER: Agricultural and food business economics did not fire me up right away. But now that I understand where you're going with it, that helps. Does that make sense? Any questions from anyone online? OK. So we all know what happens next. You have to start drafting. That's the way that it works.

When I work with students on Distinguished Scholarships applications, they typically write between six and eight drafts. And so some tips, some ways to kind of help keep yourself sane are as follows. My first suggestion is just write down-- it doesn't have to be beautiful. It doesn't have to be in chronological order or as levels of importance to you or anything like that.

Just write down some things that readers might be interested in learning about you, the same kinds of things you would share when you met someone at a dinner party or when you met

someone in class for the first time that you would kind of share, here's what I'm involved in. Here's who I am. That's that little snippet of you.

Another thing I always talked to my students about is how they spend their time. How you spend your time is very indicative of your priorities. So if you are-- I'm going to say this story because I tell this story. But now it's going to be recorded for all time. I make fun of my 17-year-old son, because he spends a lot of time watching videos on YouTube, which is, again, I'm sure that's a generational thing.

And so then I think, OK, what career path is ahead for you, my friend, of watching YouTube videos. Because I don't think there is one. I have yet to find it. But I also have to put the side element of, he's a couple of weeks away from finishing his Eagle Scout. He has worked at a Boy Scout camp for two summers. He's in ASB at his school, played varsity football last year.

So those are the other-- so as the mom, I make fun of the YouTube. But I have to give him a little bit of props that he does spend his time doing other things. So if you are a communications major, but you're spending all of your time working in the makerspace lab on campus building a skateboard, I might say, gosh, what's going on here? There's a little bit of a disconnect.

Or if you are a STEM major, but really the thing that you care the most about is being involved with the literary magazine at WSU, again, I might say, hmm, we've got some choices that we're going to need to make. What are your priorities? How are you choosing to spend your time? Because that's really telling me what's important to you. So writing those kinds of things down really helps you get a sense of who you are and what your priorities are.

Thinking about the accomplishments that you're proud of, your best traits, and when you display those is important. And maybe some things that are really interesting about you. Again, we might have a room that all gives the same sort of, I just had a regular old life and did this. And there's not really anything that stands out about me. That's not going to be the case, because we're going to start to fill in with these stories of who you are. And we're going to start to see how different you are from the person next to you.

You have to use the writing process as a vehicle for discovery though. I always encourage students to consider multiple drafts, to try a new format. I had one student who wrote an entire draft for me of her personal statement in-- oh, shoot. Now, it's escaping me. It was sort of third person, so removed perspective. So she talked more as though she was observing herself having these interactions as a technique it didn't really work very well.

And I remember thinking, I'm not sure how I'm going to go back and tell you that this is not the best technique. And she sent me a note afterwards and went like, that was just an experiment. I was just trying some things out. I've already changed my mind. I said, OK. But trying it out helped her to see, ooh, that didn't work. OK, let me find a path that does work a little bit better.

The other option is just set yourself a timer and say, I'm just going to write for 20 minutes. And I'm going to write about the things that come to my head. And then I'm going to put it away and come back to it two hours later and see if there's anything good there, see if there's a little bit of gold I can mine and kind of shake out from the dust and the dirt.

All of this relies on you not waiting until the night before the application is due to actually fill it out. I'm OK with students-- I tell students sometimes, at least open the application and look at it. Read through it so then it can kind of be in your head space a little bit. Right before you go to bed, you can be thinking about it. You can kind of consider a few ideas there.

But you can't open it up, type it out, push submit, and feel like you did the best work possible. Because I just don't know that that's going to work, because it just may not be the best draft. And we'll get to that in one more second.

So when you look at your resume, that's another great place to find that to look for some stories there. What on your resume stands out? Go back to that and think, OK, again, here are the things I did. And I've listed those on my resume. Why did I do that? What do they mean to you? What have you learned from those experiences? What have the highlights been?

When we talk about what have you learned from that, it can be good or bad. You can learn a lot from a position that was mind-numbing to you. You can learn a lot about yourself from a position where you had a boss who micromanaged you or who left you completely to your own devices. You can learn a lot from a position that you didn't feel invigorated by or excited about.

So thinking through those activities that are, again, beyond just what you've written on your resume. Then start writing. It's a recurring process. It's recursive, which means you have to do it over and over again. I would equate it to being physically fit. You are not going to write something once and nail it the same way you are not going to run a mile and be like, I've achieved full health. That's not how it works.

So you have to keep doing it. You keep working at it. You're going to take what you learned from this application into the next application. You're going to take what you've learned from that combination of resources that you've used and apply it the next time and the next time. So you're going to gain-- even if you don't get the funding from that scholarship, you're going to gain through going through the process.

And by keeping at it, it will help you to be better at writing so then you will end up writing a first draft that reads more like a third draft. But right now, don't fall too in love with your first draft. Because it may not be very good. Do you have a question? OK. I'm sorry to say. As you're writing your essays, go back and make sure you didn't get so distracted.

Oh, I got this great story to tell. I'm going to get off on that tangent and go with it. Make sure you haven't missed something that was in the application. A lot of applications will say, be sure

to highlight this, this, and this. If you've only highlighted two of those three, that's not going to be very effective. So make sure you didn't veer off course. Make sure you hit every point.

And the other thing that students do sometimes when I'll see them writing multi-part scholarship applications is they will write the application, and every answer stands alone beautifully. It answers the question that you have. It's just great as it is. However, it is a part of an application packet the same way a chapter of a book needs to connect to the next chapter of the book needs to connect to the next chapter. Your essays have to have that common thread or theme running through them that connects each part.

And often, they need to connect back to the goals that you have set out for yourself. If you're telling me you're applying for the scholarship because it is designed for students who are change agents, then I want to know, not only an answer to the question, but I want to know how you are a change agent in each of those scenarios. Does that make sense? A little bit? OK.

So it has to fit within the narrative. But it also has to stand alone as a strong answer. So I have a little thank you on there, because I didn't want to plagiarize. I didn't use examples from WSU students, because I didn't want any of you talking to your friends who then said, oh, my gosh I found out that you didn't-- oh, I heard you wrote that essay for experience in Hungary or something. So I used Kansas State's examples there.

I always enjoy a little meme. Letters of recommendation is the next piece that I want to talk about. So again, some scholarships require that letter of recommendation. Others do not. It is important that you ask. And how ask is going to be a big piece also, almost as important as who you ask. So let's talk a little bit about letters of recommendation.

How many of you in the room right now have three great folks who would write a letter of recommendation for you on a scholarship application? So I'm going to tell you a little story about April from a long, long time ago when I was a freshman. It's hard to find people who are going to write letters of recommendation for you, right? You're in these big classes. You haven't found your footing necessarily. You are trying to make those connections.

Now, though, is the time. Because let's say you want to apply for an internship as a sophomore or you want to apply for a job somewhere as a junior for the summer or something. This is a good time to start thinking about, ooh, where can I have some one-on-one engagement or activity with a faculty member who might be able to say more about me than, this student was in my class and they got an A?

Because this student was in my class and they got an A is not going to get you a scholarship. And certainly not the scholarships, the kinds that I work with, because those are expected. So if you're thinking about places that you might be able to cultivate some relationships, maybe think about clubs and organizations. Maybe think about where else? Jacob, I'm going to put you on the spot, because you sort of raised your hand. Who would your folks be from?

JACOB: My research advisors and my academic advisor.

APRIL SEEHAFFER: So some of you might think, oh, gosh. I only meet with my academic advisor once. Maybe it's a good idea to schedule a follow-up appointment to come in and say, I just want to talk more about ways I can get involved. Because that then shows initiative that you are the kind of student who wants to get involved, who wants to know these things, which makes it easy.

I've worked as an academic advisor for eight years before I moved over to Distinguished Scholarships. And I would make a note of that kind of thing in the student's file. So and so came in and talked to me about getting involved in clubs and activities. And so then I can go use that and go back in my letter and say, even as a freshman, they were excited about getting involved. And they came to visit me in the spring of '18 and, from that, became a member of XYZ organization and later was elected president of it.

So those are the kinds of things that you can start doing now that will help you to build on both your letters of recommendation kind of base, but it also will help you just build your experiences. It's going to benefit you in a number of ways. Even if you don't end up with someone writing a great letter of recommendation for you, they may give you advice of who else you could talk to. And then that person is the person who writes a great letter for you or hires you for their lab or has you come and do an internship with them. Does that make sense of how those kind of fall into place? OK.

If you go to the Distinguished Scholarships website, it kind of gives some additional guidelines of letters of recommendation. And these are letters of recommendation, again, in the context of nationally competitive awards. So sometimes that's what you need. Sometimes that's not what you need. But it does help give you a little bit of an outline of ways-- just some tips of things you can ask about.

Some ways to get involved. Some questions to ask so you're not feeling like, I'm going in because April told me I need to come into your office hours. But I don't know what I'm supposed to be talking about. Or my advisor told me to come and talk to this faculty mentor person. But I don't know what we're talking about. So this gives a couple of suggestions of some things to maybe research what they're doing. What kinds of things are they involved in? What kinds of projects do they work on? Because that might be a good opening.

Again, looking back on what you do in your spare time might help you to think, oh, in my spare time, I'm excited about political campaigns. So now, I should probably find an RSO that will help me connect to this campaign. Or I grew up on a dairy farm. And so I should probably get involved with-- is it CUDS? Is that the-- oh, all right, using some knowledge here.

So that's the Cooperative--

JULIANA: University of Dairy Students.

APRIL SEEHAFFER: University Of Dairy Student. So that would be-- because I'm sure there's an advisor for that. I'm sure that then leads to some internship possibilities, which could, down the road, lead to some scholarships or something. So that might be a good start for you if you're not already doing it. So thinking about those ideas will help you do that.

Obviously, when you have built this relationship and you're ready to ask a person to write a letter for you, how you ask is going to be really important as well. You need to let them know what you're applying for, when the deadline is, what they need to know about this scholarship. And I will tell you, as a person who writes letters of recommendation, I am begging you to make this as easy on me as possible.

Because if I agree to write a letter of recommendation for you, I want to do a good job. I want to help you get that internship, to make that connection, to get that job, to get that scholarship. That's why I've said, yes. Because you were a student in my class. We had a relationship. I want to support you. But if you don't help me, it's going to be harder for me to do that job well.

And by help me, I mean-- oftentimes, I will have students who will say, can I meet with you? And we'll sit down. Ideally, we'd sit down. They ask if I can be a letter writer. I say, yes. Then they say, I'm going to send you all the things you need. Typically within 24 hours, I get an email that has a copy of the scholarship or the job or the internship that they're applying for. I get a copy of their resume.

And in the body of the email, I get a little bit of a message that tells me what I'm hoping you will highlight. April, I am hoping you will highlight my leadership activities because you observed me as the president of the pre-nursing club. April, I am hoping you will highlight my involvement in ABC activity. Because as you know, when you were the advisor for that group, I participated for two years as the member coordinator. And we increased our membership 75%.

Do you know that's going right in your letter if you give me that information? April, I already have someone who's talking about my involvement. So I was hoping you could highlight my preparation for this career path that I'm leaning towards. Help them do the best job possible. Provide some of that data for them. You're not writing the letter, because that's not particularly ethical.

It's not particularly-- feels like it's one of those. It's not. You shouldn't be writing letters of recommendation for yourself. But you are helping them remember, amongst a classroom full of students, amongst years of students that they have worked with, who you are, what you brought to that organization, and how it's tied to what you want to do next. And that just makes the recommender's life so much easier.

And we're so happy when that happens. Because we're all busy, and we're all-- our brain gets full of information. Especially if you're asking someone who's been at the University for a long time, they have worked with lots and lots of students. And as much as they want to help you,

help them to do that as best as possible. So that's sort of knowing that they have your details of your accomplishments.

Coordinate effectively. It's always nice to get a little reminder. Don't forget. The deadline is coming up. I haven't seen it's been submitted or anything along-- just perfectly friendly is completely fine. I tell students, usually, I want between two to three weeks for letters. And so if you're asking for letters, try to give that same kind of time. I understand sometimes things happen. Or I heard about this opportunity, and I only have two weeks to pull everything together. Then I'm going to be a little bit more understanding.

But if you've known about something since the fall and are just asking me on January 22 and it's due January 31, you're probably getting a pretty January 22 kind of a letter. It's not going to be particularly in-depth or meaningful for you. So give them a chance to do the best job possible because they want to do the best job possible. We talked a little bit about the Distinguished Scholarships in general.

Some of the things that I help students with. We talk about their plans. We talk about their goals. We look at applications and personal statements. We encourage those relationships with advocates because we're going to be relying on them to write letters for you as you're applying for these scholarships. We help you identify gaps in your experiences.

So if there's something-- if you come in and say, I don't have anything to talk about, that's pretty obviously a gap. But if you have two or three things and the scholarship that you're applying for requires six or seven, then were asking about how to fulfill those in the next year you have or in the time that you have before you're actually applying for it. And we work on identifying other funding sources. Questions. Yeah.

AUDIENCE: Should the people that we ask to write our letters of recommendation be staff from our school or could they be from outside?

APRIL SEEHAFFER: That's a great question. I would say it depends on what the scholarship specifically is asking for. So if they're saying, two letters of recommendation, one must be from a faculty member, it's pretty obvious one has to come from a faculty member and the other one can be a boss that you had. It can be from your community. It can be from high school.

Especially with freshmen, I have students who will bring in resumes and say, gosh, I feel like I have to take everything off from my senior year. And while I want you to work towards replacing what you had in high school, there's no reason-- if you graduated valedictorian, if you were an Eagle Scout, if you earned your gold award as a Girl Scout, if you achieved those kinds of things in high school, those show longevity. And those show that you have made a lengthy commitment to an organization. So those should stay on and should stay on for a while.

But because again, I think students sometimes shy away from, oh, that was in high school. So I can't ask that person to do this letter anymore. It kind of depends on the award though. For

one of our scholarships, again, for Goldwater, Goldwater's due on the 26th. So it's due Friday. So it's all in my head right now.

But for Goldwater, because they're looking for people who are going to be at the height of their field and they are going to get a PhD in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics, they are going to potentially change the world with the things that they discover, Goldwater doesn't want a letter of recommendation from an English faculty member. They don't want it from a humanities side of things. Because a humanities faculty member, as great as they are, can't evaluate this student's potential as a leader in science.

So you want to find that match as best as possible. But you can also help-- if you don't have a great match, you can also help your letter writers by saying, I'm hoping you'll highlight this for me. Great question. Long answer. Sorry. Other questions?

AUDIENCE: Would you have someone online that is asking for, I guess, some tips? And they specifically-- their situation is that they are an online student and they're a stay-at-home mom and they have the campus nearby. And so they're not quite sure what to write about in that. But they are affiliated with their PTA preschool board, and fundraising for school.

APRIL SEEHAFFER: Yes. Yes. I would love you to tell me, as specifically as you can, about those organizations. And when I say specifically, I mean, if you're in the PTA and you're the treasurer, I want to know what your budget is. If you're the Vice President, I want to know how many members you have. I want to know what kinds of outreach you do, whether you meet on a monthly basis or whether you meet on a weekly basis.

Because that's going to provide that grit, again, that understanding of what this means to you and why this is a priority for you. So if you're involved in those kinds of activities, I think those are just as worthy to write about. But fill in the blanks for me. And I would say the same thing for Pullman students. I just learned about CUDS yesterday. So it's fresh on my mind.

But if you had said, oh, I'm involved with this dairy thing, I would not know anything else about it until you fill in those gaps for me. So as a reader, don't assume that I-- I'm going to say it the way I was going to say it. Don't assume I speak the same language that you speak, meaning if you are really into your research, you get a shorthand with the people who are doing the same kinds of research that you're doing or doing the same kinds of writing or doing the same kinds of conversations.

And you start to use acronyms. You start to shorten things, because you know what that means and everyone else who you talk to on a daily basis knows what that means. But for someone who's reading that for the first time, I don't know what that means. So help me to know why it's important that you were involved in the PTA and how you normally have a fundraiser that brings in \$500. And this year, you were the chair of it, and it brought in \$1,500.

Or I went out to local community businesses and garnered x number of dollars in donations. Whatever it happens to be, give me some of those specifics. Does that help? Well, I'm not sure. But I'm hoping-- does that help? I'll say it to the camera, because that's where the person is. Other questions? [MUSIC PLAYING]

The other thing that I wanted to mention is, if that student who is a stay-at-home mom who's taking classes, so isn't near a physical campus to get involved with, if she's not an elementary education major or she's not an early childhood development major, explain the two areas of her interest to me then also. That goes back to the goal side.

Because if you have this list of experiences and activities that don't relate to, oh, I'm going to be in digital technology, but I'm doing all this stuff with PTA and none of it has to do with digital technology, I'm not going to see that connection right away. So making sure that she explains that in the thread is going to be important, because it needs to all tie back to the goals of, this is the way I could be involved. This is a priority for me based on my children's education. Those are all fair statements to make in an application.

Last thing I will tell you is-- and this comes from being a reader of multiple scholarship applications, not so much from the Distinguished Scholarships side of things. But I have served as a reader for lots of different scholarships at WSU and statewide. If you are applying for a scholarship, I assume you need the money. Please don't tell me. Please don't use your valuable space to tell me how much you need the money. Because I'm going to assume that.

I want to know more about you. Everyone who's applying for a scholarship needs the money. So that sounds a little bit cold-hearted, but you have 500 words. Tell me your 500 words about you, not make an appeal to me that's going to make me say, yeah. I don't think that's anything different than anyone else who's writing this scholarship application. So tell me more about yourself.

If you're telling me that you're working three jobs, that's telling me that you need the money without saying, I'm desperate for some financial aid here, or I'm desperate for a scholarship. Students-- I just read for an award that we're giving out. And probably 8 of 10 that I read told me how much they needed the money, which doesn't help me select you as an awardee.

What I wanted to know is how does this tie to your major. What are you going to do with it? How are you equipped to carry out this project? What have you done already and what are you doing in the future? So just keep that in mind. Again, that feels like I should-- if I had my name tag on, I would cover up the Distinguished Scholarships part on that. That just comes from being a reader of these awards often. Yeah.

AUDIENCE: So we had another question come in. And it's, to which students is the Goldwater scholarship directed at? [INAUDIBLE] PhD?

APRIL SEEHAFER: You apply as a sophomore or as a junior undergrad. But your eventual goal has to be a terminal degree in a STEM field. Typically, students who qualify for Goldwater have participated in research labs. If not one, definitely one and usually two to three. They often have presentations at national conferences. And they've often been published with their research as well.

You can read more about it from the Distinguished Scholarships page though. And it will talk right through the steps, such as students do. All right. Anything else? OK, well if you do, I'll be here. Otherwise, you can send me an email. And I'm happy to help. Thank you so much for coming tonight. I hope it was helpful. And have a great rest of your night.