

## College Procedure: 400.12 – References for Students

Policy Reference: 400 – Employee Ethics and Conduct  
Responsible Department: Human Resources  
Approval Authority: Cabinet  
Procedure Owner: Vice President, Human Resources  
Effective Date: 02/25/2013

Version Number: 3  
Legal Counsel Reviewed (yes/no): No  
Scope: College-wide

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### Reason for Procedure

Kirkwood's position on providing references and recommendations for students is that the reference provider must follow established guidelines in order to comply with the legal constraints in providing references.

### The Procedure

Individual staff members can be held liable if illegal or unauthorized information is released about a student. In order to avoid potential difficulties, staff and faculty should:

- 1) Require students to provide a signed [release form](#) prior to releasing any information about them for a reference. The student may provide a release from a third-party vendor.
- 2) After obtaining a signed release form, provide the student, if possible, with a written reference response prior to providing a reference, unless the student has waived their right to read the reference.

All information provided in a reference check must be accurate and in good faith. The reference provider must not knowingly provide false information or have malicious intent. Reference providers should confine their information to the questions that are asked and refrain from volunteering information, especially if it is negative in nature. The reference provider should never make inappropriate comments that could be interpreted as malicious. Providing opinions about a student's performance and competence is acceptable, as long as they are honestly held opinions. If a student asks you to serve as a reference, and your opinion is negative towards that individual, it is best to decline the request.

Information provided during an employment or academic reference check should be specific and work-related in nature. Descriptions of performance and conduct should be based on classroom, academic or work behavior. Appropriate topics include performance, achievements, general work habits, abilities and on-the-job conduct. Reference providers need to use caution so that information provided does not

violate the student’s civil rights such as information that reveals age, appearance (including pregnancy), citizenship, disabilities, race, religion, workers’ compensation claims or other information that is protected. Information must not violate the student’s rights under FERPA.

Prior to providing a reference, the reference provider should verify the identity of the person requesting the reference. If a verbal reference check is requested, the identity of the reference seeker can be obtained by requesting a callback telephone number and returning the call.

When providing a verbal reference, document the questions you are asked and your responses. When providing a written reference, make a copy of the reference letter or form. Retain the notes, forms and letters in your personal records for one year after providing a reference.

## Revision Log

*Table 1 Revision Log*

Version Number	Date Approved	Approved by	Description of Change
1	02/25/2013	Jim Choate, Vice President, Finance	New procedure
2	05/15/2017	Mick Starcevich, President	New template
3	07/15/2019	Cabinet	Procedure template