

GENERAL INFORMATION

What is a credential file, and how could I use one?

A credential file is an institutional record file containing information useful to an employer in evaluating your background for a position; or to be sent to graduate school in support of your application for admission.

Who is eligible to establish a credential file?

Any senior or alumnus/a of the College of Charleston may establish a credential file. Typically this service is most used by students/alumni from education degree programs, as most school districts require the documentation contained in the credential file as part of their application process.

What should my file contain?

- **Letters of recommendation** – Typically, 3-5 letters that may be written on the writer's letterhead or on the recommendation forms provided by the Career Center. The recommendation form provided by the Career Center contains a "Waiver of Access" statement. By signing this statement, you have waived your right to access that particular letter.
Education majors: Include recommendation letters from your classroom co-operating teacher and from the faculty supervisor of your clinical practice assignment. Other letters may include those from professors, principals and/or previous/current employers.
If using the file to apply for graduate programs: include letters from professors, faculty advisors and previous/current employers

There is no limit to the number of recommendations that may be stored in your file, but no more than six will be forwarded with each request.

- **Transcripts:** If you have established a credential file in the Career Center, the Career Center can request that the Registrar's Office send an official copy of your most recent final College of Charleston transcript to the Career Center for inclusion in your file. (This request is made after final grades are posted in order to reflect your official graduation date from the College.) If you wish to send out transcripts prior to your final transcript being received in your credential file, you must make a request with the Registrar's Office for your official transcript to be mailed to the employer/school to which you are applying.

If you received your bachelor's degree from the College of Charleston and you are a current Master's candidate, you must specifically ask the Career Center to request your undergraduate transcript from the Registrar's Office for your file – our office does not have access to your previous transcripts.

If you attended another college or university prior to attending the College of Charleston, you must request your transcript from that institution if you wish those transcripts to be included in your file. Transcripts from other institutions should be mailed to the Career Center.

- **Resume or Curriculum Vitae:** If the credential file is being used in support of your applications for employment, you may include a resume. If the file is being used to support your applications for graduate school, you may wish to include a curriculum vitae.
- **Additional materials to include if applying for teaching opportunities** – a copy of PRAXIS scores and Letter of Intent. (The College of Charleston School of Education will send the Career Center a copy of each of these documents). You should check with our office to make sure that these documents have been received and are included in your credential file.

The Letter of Intent is a letter sent to the S.C. Department of Education Division of Teacher Quality once you have met the criteria for certification. This letter may be sent to school districts to indicate you have met the criteria of certification until you receive formal notification of your certification status.

Who is responsible for collecting and maintaining credentials information?

Students and alumni are responsible for ensuring that information they wish to include in the credential file is sent to Career Center.

ESTABLISHING A FILE

How do I start a credential file?

To open a file you must first read all materials in the packet thoroughly, and complete and return the ***Credential File Information Form/Recommendation & Transcript Release Form*** to the Career Center.

What information is needed on the Recommendation & Transcript Release Form?

This form is required under the Buckley/Pell Amendment to the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974. No information in your credential file may be released without your written permission.

- **Permission to disclose information section:** Students/Alumni who wish to use credential services must authorize Career Center to disclose their file to prospective employers. To do so, sign and date the *Permission to Disclose Information* statement on the Recommendation and Transcript Release Form.
- **Waiver of access section:** Students/Alumni choose whether they want to be able to review letters of recommendation contained in their Credential File. By choosing to waive their rights of access on this section of the form, students/alumni will not have access to any confidential letters of recommendation contained in their files. Each Recommendation Form provided contains a waiver section. By signing the waiver on the Recommendation Form, you are indicating that the letter is to be considered confidential, and you will not be able to access these recommendations.
- **Credential File Request Policy Section:** Contains fee information for credential file services. By signing this section, students/alumni verify that they are aware of the fees involved in utilizing this service.

How are letters of recommendation obtained and submitted to the Career Center?

It is the student's responsibility to obtain letters of recommendation. This packet includes forms for you to give to reference writers. Follow these procedures to obtain letters of recommendation, and to have those letters submitted to the Career Center:

1. Ask the person if they can serve as a positive reference
2. If so, give the reference the Recommendation Form
 - a. Type in the information requested at the top of each Recommendation Form
 - b. Sign the waiver, if you wish to do so, before giving the form to the writer. Letters of recommendation may also be typed on the writer's own letterhead stationery, but the Recommendation Form should still be included with each letter in order to indicate whether or not you wish to waive your right to access to that letter.
3. Request that the writer send the completed recommendation form and/or letter directly to the Career Center. It is recommended that you provide the writer with a stamped envelope addressed to the Career Center.

Whom should I ask to write my letters of recommendation?

A combination of professors and employers is a common choice. Other individuals who know you professionally would also be appropriate choices, including internship supervisors, advisors, and co-workers. You will want to select your recommenders carefully, and always ask them if they would be willing to write a recommendation letter on your behalf. To assist them in writing a suitable letter, let them know about your goals and career objectives. For those of you pursuing employment in the field of Education, letters from your cooperating teacher and faculty supervisor are expected.

Can I read and have copies of the letters in my file?

You may read and have copies of your letters unless you waive your right of access to these letters. In 1974, the Buckley Amendment was passed into law, stating that all reference letters written after December, 1974 are assumed non-confidential (open to you), unless you waive your right of access to these letters. The option to waive your right of access to your confidential letters of reference is contained on each Recommendation Form. You should read and sign this section of the form if electing to use confidential references.

Why would anyone waive their right to read their own reference letters?

It has been argued that a closed, or confidential, reference letter may be perceived as a more honest appraisal of a job applicant, particularly when it comes to weaknesses, and may be given more credibility by a perspective employer. However, it is up to the individual, in light of his/her relationship with the reference writer, to decide what he/she finds most appropriate.

How will I know when my file is complete?

It is your responsibility to check with the Career Center to ensure your file is complete and that your recommendation letters, resumes, and transcripts have been received and are in your credential file. **DO NOT ASSUME THAT YOUR FILE IS COMPLETE - BE CERTAIN!** By following up with the Career Center, you will save yourself from unnecessary problems and delays when you wish to use your file.

REQUESTING MAILINGS

How do I make a request for my file to be sent?

If you would like to have your file sent, complete a Credential File Request Form and mail, fax, or bring it to Career Center. Include the name and title of the person to be receiving your file, the complete address of each place, your name, year of graduation, major, and telephone number. Also enclose payment for your request, if applicable. Checks should be made payable to the College of Charleston.

Important Note: If you are sending your file for teaching positions, be sure to submit the district's application for employment first, and then request that your credential file be sent. The credential file should be sent after formal application is made.

How long does it take to process a request?

Unless unusual circumstances arise, credential file packages are mailed within 48 hours of time the request was received in Career Center.

FEES

What fees are involved?

There is no fee to establish your credential file, and the first five (5) credential files requested will be sent to employers free of charge. Additional files requested after the first five will have a charge of \$2.00 per file to cover processing costs. This fee is due at the time of the request. Our file request policy is included in the waiver form in your credential file packet, and you should read and sign this section prior to submitting your completed forms to our office.

The Career Center reserves the right to withhold credential file services to individuals with outstanding accounts due balances.

File Maintenance

How long is my credential file maintained by the Career Center?

Credential files are maintained as active for a period of five years following your graduation date for education majors, and three years following your graduation date for all other majors. After this period of time, we send out a notice to the last known address you provided to the Career Center, asking if you wish to have your file retained. If we do not receive confirmation by the deadline specified, the file material will be shredded.

COLLEGE of CHARLESTON

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