



## Serving as a Reference

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### Career Planning for Managers

#### **Why serve as a reference?**

As a supervisor or manager, it is likely that a current or past employee will ask you to serve as a reference. Information from references can be a key reason why someone would or would not get a particular job, so you need to consider whether or not you feel comfortable serving as a reference. If so, think about how to help your employee attain his/her goals through your reference.

#### **What should you consider when serving as a reference?**

Serving as a reference can be complicated legally. To help you, HR-114 (<http://www.umssystem.edu/ums/rules/hrm/hr100/hr114>) describes what information you can and cannot release when giving a reference. For instance, student employees are protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), so written permission from the student must be obtained before any information is released.

Other tips for serving as a reference

- Only answer specific questions. If the person asks something general like, “What did you think about Mary?” ask them to be more specific.
- Before sharing something that may be perceived negatively about an employee, consider if you’ve discussed the issue with the employee previously. If you haven’t, don’t provide that information.
- Try to be as objective and/or specific as possible. For instance, try saying, “Mary met all of her deadlines for her reports and was well-prepared when necessary for meetings,” instead of, “Mary was very reliable.”