Requesting Letters of Recommendation
From CNS Career Development Handbook

Whether you plan on graduate school or not, it is likely that you will need recommendation letters to apply for a job or other opportunity. These letters should come from people with the ability to evaluate your work – your faculty, lab PI’s, internship supervisors, etc. Knowing this moment will come, you can prepare for it now by making sure that your faculty know who you are. Train them to learn your name and face. If they don’t really know who you are and what your interests and expertise are, they will not be able to write a strong letter. It is your job to become known to your future letter writers.

There are companies that will offer to store and send your recommendation letters. It is best to avoid these services as they don’t really help. The best recommendation letters are freshly written with knowledge of both the applicant and the opportunity to which they apply. Before graduating, you should establish who your letter writers will be, get their contact information, and get them to accept this future role.

When the time comes, you will contact your letter writers and provide them with your updated resume, your cover letter or personal statement, and full information about the place to which you are applying. Having your application materials revised well before the deadline will give your letter writers the ability to be well informed and specific in their letters. You will want to make this as easy as possible for your writers by providing the full names, titles and contact information of those who should receive the letters. Give them as much writing time as possible and remember that faculty are busiest at (and just after) final exams time.

It is standard for you to be asked to sign a non-disclosure statement that waives your right to see your recommendation letters. Waiving this right adds credibility to the content of the letter. If you are interested in what the letter says, your letter writers may be willing to share that with you directly. You can ask, but there is no expectation that they would offer to do so.