

Scholarship and Admission Interview Workshop
Monday, September 26, 2011

The following advice was shared by our guest speakers, Mr. Scott Boze and Mr. Mark Miles, along with advice and resources from the College Counseling staff.

How to Prepare for a Merit Scholarship Interview

Understand the scholarship's selection criteria and process.

- Study the application questions.
- Review website information.
- Talk with recent applicants/recipients of the scholarship.
- Make sure you know what the scholarship program includes/requires.

Think about your story beforehand – what do you want them to know about you?

- Prepare 2-3 items that show the best side of you; be humble; but don't be afraid to brag.
- Make sure you talk to the selection criteria.
- Highlight stories that show initiative, leadership, teamwork.
- If an opportunity was given to you, show how you took maximum advantage of it.
- Steer interview answers to your facts/stories.
- Know why you want to win the scholarship and go to the school.

Be aware of current events.

- Watch the news, read the paper, or the internet.
- Focus on issues important to young people or with an ethical question involved.
- Don't be afraid to have an opinion but always be respectful of other's opinions.
- If asked a tough question, it's okay to say that you aren't sure.
- Practice how you'll deal with a "curveball" or tricky question.

Practice... Practice... Practice...

- Practice interviewing with peers, counselors, teachers, and other adults.
- Ask for their candid feedback and constructive criticism.
- When you speak, maintain natural voice inflection.
- Be enthusiastic but relaxed and confident.

How to Prepare for a General Admission Interview

Review the scholarship interview advice above because most of it is also true for a general admission interview.

Understand the role the interview will play in the admission process.

- Is the interview evaluative or strictly informational? Some "interviews" are strictly informational, meaning it might not influence the admission process.
- Regardless, if a school you're considering offers an interview, it's in your best interest to participate if you are able to do so. Many schools will use your participation in the interview as a gauge of your interest in the institution.
- Will you interview with a local alum, an admission officer, or a current student (rare)?
- Understand that most evaluative admission interviews provide the following opportunities:
 - You will answer questions about your experiences and provide information about yourself to the admission committee.
 - You may ask questions of the college representative/alumnus about the institution.
 - The representative will extol the virtues of the particular college or university.
- Many schools do not offer an interview as part of their admission process. If the school does not, don't panic. It's not necessary to find a random local alumnus to recommend you.
- Don't ask the interviewer your chances of being admitted, especially if the interviewer is an alumnus.

Think about what you want the school to know about you.

- Review sample interview questions so that you're aware of commonly asked questions. (*In this document, we've included a long list of sample interview questions.*)
- Be prepared with stories and examples, but don't be too rehearsed or robotic in your responses
- Think of 2-3 items/stories that show your most impressive characteristics, academic curiosity, initiative, leadership, teamwork, etc, and steer interview answers to your facts/stories.
- You may wish to bring your résumé to give the interviewer. Don't bring your transcript or scores unless specifically told to do so.

Be well informed about the school and become better informed with intelligent questions.

- Study the school's website and brochures.
- Know a bit about programs and opportunities that make the school a great fit for you.
- Make sure you have two or three questions prepared to ask the interviewer about the school. Impress the school with informed and interesting questions about the institution. (*At the end of this document, we've included some generic questions; adapt them to the particular school.*)
- Ask questions that have answers you do not already know and can't easily find on the school's website.
- Ask questions that are open-ended. It's okay to ask the interviewer's opinion about some aspect of the school.

As with scholarship interviews, be aware of current events and practice your interviewing skills.

Interview Etiquette

Make a good entry.

- Of course, be on time for the interview.
- Dress appropriately and professionally.
 - if you're interviewing for a scholarship, coat and tie/dress is almost always appropriate
 - for an admission interview dress might vary~dressy if you're interviewing on campus with the Dean or business casual if interviewing with an alum in a coffee shop
 - when in doubt about appropriate dress, call the admission office and ask
- Look every interviewer in the eye and shake their hand firmly.
- Project confidence.

Answer questions directly and succinctly.

- Take a moment before answering if needed.
- Don't talk to fill space; be aware of time constraints.
- Remember your personal story and be yourself.

Body language is half the interview (and sometimes more).

- Maintain eye contact almost 100% of the time, and if there is more than one interviewer, alternate looking at everyone in the room.
- Posture – be confident but relaxed.
- Be aware of nervous habits. What are you doing with your hands? Are you playing with your hair, shaking your leg, or clicking your ballpoint pen?

Look for non-verbal clues from your interviewer.

- Read their body language and actions.
- Try to make a connection and have a conversation if possible.

Make sure you know the name(s) of the interviewer(s).

- You may be nervous, so write it down if it's not printed somewhere.
- If it's an admission interview, ask if it would be okay to follow-up with the interviewer if you have additional questions. Get the person's name, email, and mailing address or business card.
- Hand-write (if possible) or email a thank you note to the interviewer within a couple of days of the interview.

Sample Admission Interview Questions

Academic

- Tell me about the classes you're currently taking.
- What's the best class you've ever taken?
- What academic courses most interest you? Why?
- What are you thinking of studying in college? Have you taken any high school classes related to that subject?
- Tell me about an academic challenge you have faced; what was it and how did you overcome it?

Activities

- If you had a day all to yourself, how would you spend it?
- Tell me about the activities that are most important to you.
- Do you plan to continue those activities in college?
- Is there any new organization or club that you would like to try in college?
- What's the most difficult task you've completed? Are you proud of your results?
- What are your two or three most significant accomplishments? Why are they significant?
- How have you spent your summers? Why did you devote time to these summer activities?
- Tell me about your leadership experiences in school or your community.

General/personality/interests

- Tell me about yourself.
- Who are you?
- Tell me about a book that everyone should read.
- What's your favorite book? Why?
- What books have you read for pleasure recently?
- Tell me about a time when you have to do something extremely difficult.
- If you could meet a person in history or a character in fiction, who would it be and why?
- What are the most important issues facing our country? Why?
- What are the greatest challenges facing your generation? Do you have any ideas about how to face/remedy those challenges?
- What's the most meaningful (or rewarding) thing you've ever done for another person?
- Tell me about one or two people, books, or experiences that have changed the way you consider the world.
- What are your talents? How have you used them?
- What characteristics/traits/skills would you most like to develop?
- What have you done to better yourself in the last year?
- What one place would you most like to visit? Why?
- What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- If you had a 'do over button' when would you have used it?
- Where do you get your news and what news has been most concerning to you of late?
- Is there any other information you'd like to share?

- Is there something which you hoped I would ask you that I have not?

Family and community

- Do you think your life will be easier than your parents'?
- What do you like and dislike about the community in which you live?
- What would you change about your high school?
- What will you miss most about your family, high school, community?
- Do you have siblings? Older, younger?
- How do you think your parents feel about your leaving for college?
- How do you think your family or community has influenced who you are today?

General college and college-specific

- How do you hope your college years will be different from high school?
- How did you become interested in _____ College? Have you visited?
- What is it about _____ University that appeals to you most?
- What will you bring to our campus?
- Why do you think _____ should admit you?
- What criteria are you using to select a college?
- When you think about your future college experience, what are you most excited about?
- Do you have any questions for me as an alumnus/na of the University?
- What other schools are you considering? Are we your #1 choice? (Interviewers should not ask these questions, but if they do, answer honestly but diplomatically.)

Below is a quotation about interviewing from Martha Allman, Wake Forrest's Dean of Admission. We love the philosophy expressed. It's common that interviews will begin in a general way and drift according to the student's interests, experiences, and responses.

"Do we have a common set of questions that can be rehearsed and prepared for? No. Do we often delve into areas of current events, high school classes, reading, or extra-curricular talents? Yes. Are there expected responses that we hope each question will elicit? Absolutely not. We like to be surprised. What we hope for most of all with the interview is insight into who the applicant really is at age 17, what ideas interest her, what experiences have shaped him, what are her hopes for the future and his concerns about the present. How open is her mind, how curious is his spirit? Is there kindness and humanity somewhere in there?"

Martha Allman, Wake Forrest's Dean of Admission

Potential Questions to Ask College Representatives in Admission Interviews

Prepare a few questions to ask the interviewer about the college or university.

- At college fairs hosted by Colleges That Change Lives (CTCL), the group provides this list of questions to help students explore college and university options. (Visit www.ctcl.org.)
- These may be helpful when thinking of questions to ask interviewers.
- Try to adapt the questions to each college, and use your knowledge of the school to ask specific questions about specific programs and opportunities.
- If you're interviewing with an admission counselor, he or she will be able to answer most of these questions with ease.
- If you're interviewing with an alumnus, some of these questions may be too specific for them to answer accurately. Understand that alumni interviewers will not know detailed information about every program, organization, and department at the school.

On the Academic Environment

- Do faculty members hold students to high standards?
- How much time do students spend on work outside of class?
- What type of evaluations (i.e., exams/papers) do faculty members use most often?
- What type of thinking do exams and assignments require?
- How do students receive feedback on academic work, and how often do they receive it?
- Do students work together on projects?
- How often are students required to do presentations in class?
- How often do students discuss ideas in class?
- Is there a required first-year program and a culminating senior experience?
- Are students able to easily access courses outside of their major?
- What is the average class size? Is the statistic a four-year average? What's the average first-year class size, and what is the range of class sizes a student might experience?
- How is this school distinctive?
- How would you describe students' relationships with professors?

On the Campus Environment

- Do students and faculty serve together on campus committees?
- How well do students get along with each other?
- How many students participate in community-based service projects?
- How easy is it to be involved in student leadership activities?
- How often do students interact with peers of different racial or ethnic backgrounds or social, political, and religious views?
- How many students study abroad?
- What do most students do for fun?
- Are there opportunities for spiritual activities?
- What kinds of activities are students involved in outside the classroom, and how accessible are these activities to first-year students?
- Are activities in music, theater, and fine arts limited to students majoring in these areas?

- Are the students satisfied with their experience? Would they make the same college choice if they had to do it again?
- Is athletic participation limited to varsity athletes?
- What percentage of students are involved in athletics or intramural sports?
- What about school or class spirit and about campus traditions?
- How would you describe the student body's personality?

On Campus Resources

- What types of financial aid and scholarships are available? Are they renewable each year?
- Who assists students with course selection and career advising? How often does this happen?
- How accessible are library and technology resources?
- What safety/security services are available, and how often do students use them?
- What health and personal counseling services are available?
- What career planning and job placement services and/or internship experiences are available? How early can these services be accessed? What data is available on graduate and professional school enrollment and job placement for students?
- How many students transfer to another school during or after their first year?