

# Tips for a Successful College Interview

## **Know what the interview means at each college.**

If the interview is **evaluative**, it allows you to introduce yourself in a way that can distinguish you from the many other candidates applying for admission. You and your interviewer engage in friendly conversation and you will be encouraged to discuss your school, your courses, your interests and activities, and your academic and personal goals. You should also ask any questions you have about the college and the application process. An interview summary, written by the interviewer after your discussion, describes your individual qualities and ability to contribute to the college community and becomes part of your application file when you apply.

An **informational** interview requires *you* to direct the conversation. The interviewer's questions may be as general as, "What can I tell you about this school?" or "What questions do you have about the application process?" Typically, no written evaluation is included in your application file after an informational interview. The purpose of the interview is to answer your general questions.

## **Know something about the college before you visit.**

You are not expected to be an expert on the college, but you should know basic facts before your interview. Viewbooks, catalogs, and college guides are all good sources of basic information. Be prepared to talk about your college search. What are you looking for in a college? What is important to you? What is your vision of the ideal college? How did you decide to visit this specific campus?

## **Think about your high school years.**

Be thoughtful. What do you do with your "free" time? How would your parents, teachers, and friends describe you? Make a list of extracurricular interests and hobbies that have been important to you. How have you spent your summers? Have you ever worked, either on a volunteer basis or for pay? How have you changed during your high school years?

## **Know your high school.**

The colleges you apply to will assess your achievements within the context of your high school. Are honors, AP, or IB courses offered? How large is your high school? How many students are in your senior class? You should be able to describe your school, the courses you have taken and the level of competition you have faced. What course in high school has been toughest for you? Do you regret any course choices? Try not to complain about "bad" teachers! How diverse is your high school population and your community?

## **Watch your language!**

Avoid slang and don't say "you know," "like," and "um." The interviewer wants to get to know you as an individual and to evaluate you as a potential student. Listen carefully to the questions, think before you respond, and express your ideas clearly. Obviously, don't use any offensive language.

**Be aware of your body language.**

Establish good eye contact with the interviewer. When people look at each other they communicate more effectively. Be aware of how you act when you are nervous. Do you tap your foot? Twist or flip your hair? Look at the floor? If you can identify your nervous habits ahead of time you can avoid them in the interview.

**Be prepared to ask questions.**

Ask questions regarding academic requirements or special services offered by the college, but avoid basic questions that should have been answered in your preliminary research. Use your time wisely by asking about things that interest you. You might ask about internship opportunities, accessibility of professors, athletic facilities and sports teams, leadership positions for students, or social life on campus. Ask questions that will help you distinguish qualitative differences between similar colleges. It's a good idea to bring your list of questions to the interview.

**Dress comfortably and appropriately.**

Most admission interviewers recommend that you wear clothes that are comfortable for you and make you feel good about yourself. You don't have to "dress up" in a skirt or necktie unless that's how you're most comfortable. Remember, though, that you want to make a positive impression on your interviewer. What's appropriate for a night out with your friends may not be a good choice for your interview attire.

**Be honest. Don't pretend.**

Share any serious personal difficulty that has impacted your academic record with your interviewer. Don't try to guess "the right answer" to the questions (there are none). What you have done is not nearly so important as why you did it, why it was important to you, and how it has helped you to grow. If you have a weakness in your record (for example, a poor grade or semester of poor grades) try to put it into perspective for the interviewer. Be honest. If this is your first interview and you're nervous, share those feelings. If you're afraid that some aspect of the college might not be right for you, voice your concern. Feel good about yourself and convey that feeling to the interviewer. You can be positive about your accomplishments without sounding conceited. Interviewers *expect* you to say good things about yourself.

**Be sure to follow-up after the interview.**

Interviewers, like everyone else, appreciate being thanked for their time. Write down the name of your interviewer as well as the date (many will give you a business card) and send a personal thank you note after returning home. Colleges notice the gesture and it helps to reinforce a positive impression. If you enjoyed your interview and visit, find out about opportunities for you to return and to stay overnight on campus, sit in on classes, or attend upcoming special programs.

Remember that every college or university wants you to leave your visit feeling good about the experience. If you take the time to research colleges, and then do a little thinking about how you've spent your time and what is important to you, you'll find your visits both informative and enjoyable.

**Good Luck!**

## Consider Asking These Questions...

- ✓ What is the surrounding town/community like?
- ✓ Is there a freshman orientation program? What does it involve?
- ✓ Are freshmen allowed to have cars on campus?
- ✓ What kinds of off-campus programs are available (study abroad, co-op, etc.)?
- ✓ What do students do on weekends? Do they stay on campus?
- ✓ What is required for admission and what are the dates and deadlines for applications?
- ✓ Are there scholarships available and is there an application process for those?
- ✓ Is there an honors program?
- ✓ What forms are required for financial aid and what are the filing deadlines?
- ✓ Are there any fees in addition to tuition, room & board?
- ✓ What is the academic profile of an average accepted student?
- ✓ What are the housing options? Is housing guaranteed?
- ✓ What percent of students live on campus?
- ✓ Are the residence hall rooms wired?
- ✓ Will I need to bring my own computer?
- ✓ What are the average and largest class sizes?
- ✓ Do graduate assistants teach any courses?
- ✓ How accessible are the faculty?
- ✓ What types of academic support are available to students?
- ✓ Will I have a faculty and/or academic advisor?
- ✓ Are there opportunities for student research?
- ✓ How difficult is it to change majors?
- ✓ What kinds of clubs and activities are offered? Is it easy to get involved?
- ✓ What athletic offerings are available? Are sporting events well attended?
- ✓ What is the freshman retention rate?
- ✓ How many students graduate in four years?
- ✓ What types of career services are available (internships, workshops, corporate recruiting program)?
- ✓ What is the job placement rate for graduates?