Navigating Admissions Interviews

The admissions interview is an extremely important part of the application process to many selective colleges and universities. The interview allows the Admissions Office to acquire a first hand sense of your character, passions and concerns. Typically, the most elite universities make enormous efforts to have local alumni interview undergraduate applicants. Other institutions, encourage visiting candidates to apply for an interview if possible. If offered this opportunity, prospective students should make every effort to accept the invitation and prepare themselves for the event. There are a few key points that all applicants should bear in mind during an interview:

Know the school
Interviewers are aware that applicants apply to many other schools. However, they want to determine the candidate’s sincere interest in attending their institution and whether that interest is based on the ‘right’ rather than facile reasons. Simply stating that a school is prestigious is NOT a good enough reason. Serious candidates should be able to explain their interest from a knowledgeable perspective. For example they should know the types of majors and courses offered and what departments (faculties) and professors are famous for their research and teaching. Finding this information out previously from the web and other hard copy literature will help distinguish knowledgeable and self-motivated candidates from their peers.

Know thyself:
Hopefully you did a written self-assessment before you even started the application process. With this in hand, researching schools becomes a less exhaustive and more focused process. For example, one could ask whether a school in question has the facilities to accommodate your academic interests, learning style, social and extracurricular needs. Do you thrive in smaller classes and appreciate having direct access to your professors? Do you enjoy doing volunteer work? If so, what kind of activities interests you most? Do you thrive in situations where your peers have similar or differing backgrounds and perspectives?

Ask Questions:
If you cannot find answers to these questions on the school’s website or literature, be sure to raise them during the interview. Indeed, you should bring a list of questions with you to the interview that cannot be found on the school’s website. Asking these questions demonstrates your serious interest in the school and the extent of your intellectual curiosity. Asking questions that are easily found on the website, however, is a sure indication that the candidate did not do his/her homework! Always remember that the interview provides candidates with an opportunity to closely analyze the school and what it has to offer them. But, it also provides the interviewer with an opportunity to analyze the candidate’s suitability for admission.

Promote your strengths:
No one loves a braggadocio. However, the interview provides candidates with a unique opportunity to market their strengths, to illustrate what they can bring to campus and to demonstrate their uniqueness. With this in mind, you should have a list of personal attributes that you want the interviewer to know before the session ends. The goal is to demonstrate your uniqueness as an individual and your value as a potential member of the much sought after diverse student body.
**Adopt a professional manner:**

The admissions interview is casual, but the interaction with the interviewer before and after the interview should always be professional in nature. Play it safe and treat the admissions interview process similar to that of a job interview. Dress neatly for the session and adopt a more formal tone in all e-mail and written communications. All communications should exhibit standard written English and be checked for grammar and spelling mistakes (especially the interviewer's name!) prior to being dispatched. Remember that the purpose of the interview is to provide the interviewer with an opportunity to analyze a candidate’s suitability for admission. Therefore, it behooves candidates to place their best foot forward at all times.

Unless you have a compelling reason, always defer to the interviewer's suggested meeting place and time for the interview. Sending a follow-up message thanking the interviewer after the meeting will set you apart from others.