



## THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

### 1. Preparing for the Interview:

- (a) Don't forget that "practice makes perfect." Although you cannot practice your exact answers since you won't know the questions ahead of time, you can still practice with sample questions. This will make you feel more comfortable and confident when answering impromptu questions. Ease and confidence are things that will impress the panelists.
- (b) Make sure you understand the background and the specific purposes of the fellowship or scholarship for which you are applying.
- (c) Make a list of character traits you want to project and any specific ideas you want to address.
- (d) Review your application. Questions will most likely come from the information you have provided, and the panel will want to ask you about your achievements, extracurricular activities, and community service.
- (e) Know your personal statement and/or policy proposal inside and out. Be prepared to talk about anything related to your focus.
- (f) Be up to date on current events. You may be asked to address such issues as the war on terrorism, cloning, biological warfare, global warming, economic crisis and others.
- (g) Take advantage of the campus Scholarships/Fellowships Committee's willingness to do mock interviews. The mock interviews are a great opportunity to create a framework for the answers and information you want to convey. Also, use them to get a sense of timing since those precious 20 minutes go by very quickly. Ask your advisor to help you brainstorm possible questions so that you can practice answering. Even if the questions aren't the same, it will give you experience in answering on-the-spot questions. Contact people who have been through similar interviews to find out some of the things panelists expect from their candidates. Also, ask for things they did or wish they would have done during the interview.

### 2. During the Interview:

- (a) Don't be intimidated by the panelists. They will be intelligent, successful, and even famous on occasion. Be confident in sharing your ideas, respectful differences of opinion are expected and even welcomed. Debates are all right, but arguments are not—beware of the difference between the two.
- (b) Don't forget that your time is limited. Make sure you say everything you want to say in the allotted time frame.

- (c) Think before you speak. When asked a question that you're not sure about, don't be afraid to admit that you don't know. Do NOT fake answers. Also, ask for clarification if necessary. It's better to know what it is they are asking, then to try to guess.
- (d) Don't over-address a topic. If there is a topic that you are particularly strong in, ask the committee if they want you to go into it in more detail.
- (e) Expect the unexpected. Thinking on your feet is going to be a necessity. There will be questions that you won't be prepared for. If you think you've made a fool of yourself, just relax and remember the questions you answered well.
- (f) Be honest; be confident; be yourself.

## Successful Interview Traits

adapted from *Characteristics of Successful Truman Scholarship Finalists* Louis Blair, Executive Secretary, Truman Scholarship Foundation

### **Comfort during the Interview.**

It is okay to be nervous at the start, just remember to relax and settle in. Successful candidates are not easily shaken by difficult questions and they seem to enjoy the interview. "Perhaps the best sign of success is when the candidate turns the interview into a conversation with the panelists."

### **Share your ideas.**

Rarely are there cut-and-dry solutions to problems. Obstacles exist in this world. Providing your opinion on something by saying that you think some things should be "this way or that way" is not enough. Elaborate and give reasons for your convictions. Blair suggests, "The best ways to become sophisticated are probably through regularly reading the NY Times [especially the editorials] and through small- group or seminar discussions of issues."

### **Leave a positive and memorable impact.**

What makes you different from the hundred other interviewees? Do you have energy, a good sense of humor, extraordinary devotion to anything? Project who you really are, and don't merely sit back and answer questions.

### **Be well-rounded.**

Knowing a lot about your area of interest is good, but knowing things that are not related to your field is better. Don't limit yourself to one discipline, and at least be able to relate other fields to your own. "Single issue folks rarely appeal to selection panels." Panelists are looking for someone who can rise to the occasion and handle just about anything that is thrown their way. You must be more than just smart; you should lead an active life as well.

### **Be able to answer "on the fly" questions.**

Panelists will ask questions to see how you react and your ability to think on the spot. They want to make sure you can think beyond the normal train of thought. Some examples are: "What are the most meaningful books you have read that the President should read?" and "What are the biggest issues facing American Society?" Successful candidates are able to comfortably answer off-the-wall questions; some even have fun with it.

### **Answer the question.**

Make sure you address the questions the panelists ask and not necessarily the things you want to address. It's okay to abandon questions that you seem to get nowhere with. Even few successful candidates answer all of the questions well. "It is far better to keep answers short, cut losses, and let panelists pose lots of questions."

### **Keep the interview in perspective.**

Blair writes, "This is not a life and death situation. Most Finalists will get to graduate school." Having the attitude that you "have to win" or are "destined to win" is frowned upon by the panelists. Don't focus on what you think they want to hear and above all, be yourself.