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Making the Most of Your College Admissions Interview

By Elizabeth LaScala, PhD

Many students request interviews, or 'sit downs' as they are sometimes called, with admission representatives who visit our communities this time of year. Others receive emails or phone calls to schedule an interview appointment from an alumnus or other individual who represents a college. Regardless of who initiates the interview or what it is called, it is easy to impress a college interviewer if you do a little work in three areas: self-awareness, college awareness, and tapping into the wisdom of the person who conducts the interview.

Before your scheduled talk, take some time to review your resume and transcript. Now make a list of five qualities or pieces of information about you that would be beneficial for the interviewer to know. Your job is to make certain you weave this information into the conversation. I have included common interview questions at the end of this article. Practice responding to those questions. Weave the five important things you want the interviewer to know about you into your answers, and be sure to include specific examples whenever possible. Now practice with a family member, trusted friend or counselor. Do not share your list of five items with your interviewer. At the end of the mock interview, ask what they learned about you and see if it matches your list.

Before your interview, be sure to carefully research the college. Read the write-up in the most recent "Fiske Guide to Colleges or The Best 380 Colleges" by Princeton Review. Next, head to the college website. Look for opportunities that interest you academically. Check out classes and professors, and decide which ones you would enjoy if you were a student on campus now. Look into social events and clubs, research and internships. Look at the college newspaper to understand the current issues of concern to students and faculty on campus. Become fully knowledgeable about the school. Then write down at least three reasons why the college is a good match for you. This information will come in handy during the interview when you are asked a version of the question "What made you decide to apply to our college?" Or "What attracts you to our college?"

The last important part of a good college interview is knowing how to respond when asked "Do you have any questions?" Be prepared with five well-conceived questions. Avoid those questions which could be easily answered on the school's website and use this chance to dig deeper. Long before the interview takes place you should know the name and position of whom is conducting the interview. If it is young alum who just graduated from the school, you can ask questions about current campus life, culture and happenings. If the person is older, graduated long ago and does not currently work or teach on the campus, ask a question about what they studied and how they connected with their professors. If the person is an admissions rep on campus now, you can feel safe asking just about anything about campus academics and campus life. No matter who conducts the interview, if you prepare well, you will be relaxed, you will make a good impression and you will have fun! Be yourself, and, remember, the interviewer is hoping to make a good impression on you too – colleges look for reasons to admit an applicant and a good interviewer will know how to bring out the best in you.

Common interview questions:

1. Tell me about your experiences at your high school. Is there a particular experience you had there that stands out?
2. What would you change about your school if you had the power to do so?
3. What might your teachers say is your greatest strength as a student, and what are your weaknesses? (Be honest but show steps you are taking to improve.)
4. What magazines and newspapers do you like to read? (Pick sources that show intellectual curiosity and love of learning.)

5. What sort of things do you like to do outside of school?
6. In the last year, what books or articles have you read that have special meaning for you? (Be sure to explain the special meaning.)
7. If you had a time machine and could go back and change history, what time period would you go to, what would you change and why?
8. What volunteer activities are most important to you?
9. What have you done with your last two summers?
10. What accomplishment are you most proud of?
11. Who is your favorite teacher and why?
12. What do you do to relax?
13. Who is your favorite author?
14. Tell me what your favorite subjects are at school.
15. If you could solve a local or global problem, what would it be and what first steps might you take to solve it?
16. Would you rather write a report or give an oral presentation? Why?
17. What are you interested in studying in college?
18. What interests you about our college? What makes you a good match? What do you want out of college?



Elizabeth LaScala, PhD. is an independent college advisor who draws upon 25 years of higher education experience to help guide and support the college admissions process for students and their families. Dr. LaScala is a member of NACAC, WACAC and HECA. She can be contacted at (925) 891-4491 or elizabeth@doingcollege.com. Visit www.doingcollege.com for more information about her services.

In Memory

Charles R. Vierra

Former longtime Lamorinda resident Chuck Vierra passed away peacefully surrounded by his family in Asheville, North Carolina, on Sept 26.

Born and raised in Oakland, California, he was a Berkeley firefighter for 28 years, owned and operated A Ace Carpentry for 40 years and was a Korean War vet. He and his wife, Kay, lived in Moraga from 1966 to 2005.

He is preceded in death by his wife, Kay, and survived by his four daughters: Cheryl Lee (Rich), Kathy Bigelow (Rich), Lynelle Flowers (Mark), DeeDee Vierra (Lisa) and Grandsons Tim, Carl and Zach.

There will be a Celebration of Life service at 11 a.m. Oct. 24 at Chapel of the Chimes in Oakland. All are welcome. In lieu of flowers, please make a donation to the Alzheimer's Association www.alz.org.

Share Your Celebrations and Remembrances

If you would like to share an announcement about a special event or achievement, such as a wedding, engagement, scholarship or graduation of a local resident, or about a special person from Lamorinda who has passed, send a photo along with your text (up to 250 words) to storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com, and include "Celebrations and Remembrances" in the subject line.