

--- University

# *Alumni Notes: Interviewing*

## Dear Alumni Schools Committee Member:

Thanks for volunteering to talk with applicants for admission to ----

While the primary activity of ASC members involves spending some time with candidates for admission and then letting the Admission Office know of their general impressions of each candidate, there are a number of other ways in which they make additional contributions.

For instance, many ASC members find themselves being a local resource for students, parents, and schools interested in finding out more about ----. Often this is simply a matter of pointing them in the right direction (usually, the Admission Office) but it can also involve representing the University at local college nights or similar gatherings. Some ASC members keep an eye out for young men and women in their area who are outstanding in one way or another and drop them a short note suggesting that they might want to take a look at what ---- has to offer. Almost all ASC members also participate in programs (in April) that host local students who have been offered admission and are making up their minds about where to attend college and/or parties (in the summer) for students who will be entering ---- as freshmen in the fall. Sometimes, it's even possible for ASC members to help assuage the disappointment of students from their areas who were unsuccessful candidates for admission.

In any given year, our applicants will come from over 5,000 different secondary schools in all fifty states and more than one hundred foreign countries. The local ASC member is frequently the only direct personal contact a student may have with someone representing the University. Since the perceptions of ---- formed by students will be influenced in some measure by their contact with ASC members, the role of an ASC member is therefore also partly ambassadorial in nature.

As is the case with all of the highly selective colleges and universities, myths, rumors and misperceptions take root with respect to the kinds of students we seek to enroll or the way in which the admissions process works.

It is impossible to fully catalog here the sorts of misperceptions we run into, but the following will give you some flavor (and probably won't surprise you): the notion that in order to gain admission to ---- one must be a valedictorian, or be from a wealthy background, or have attended an independent school, or have had a parent or other relative attend ----, or be from a particular geographical location. In many instances, ASC members are able to make a significant contribution simply by helping to set matters straight in their respective communities.

If there is one characteristic that might be considered most essential for ASC members, I think it is that of being committed to having a *disinterested interest* in students: to be willing to give of one's time to talk with, come to know, like and admire, and help a wide-ranging and diverse group of young men and women, even while being aware that ultimately ---- is able to offer admission to only a relatively small fraction of its applicants.

ASC members acting in the capacity of one or more of the various roles mentioned above are critical to helping ---- continue to enroll outstanding undergraduates. In the pages that follow, we have made an effort, with the generous advice and counsel of the National Committee on Schools, to provide some guidelines and suggestions that we hope you will find useful.

Sincerely,

Dean of Admission

# ASC Interviews

ASC interviews provide applicants an opportunity to meet and talk with a graduate of ---- and to ask questions and/or to seek additional information about the University.

Such interviews also provide the ASC member with an opportunity to gain pertinent information about an applicant that can supplement that candidate's application to ----.

We don't want applicants to think of such interviews as yet one more "test" to be passed, but rather as an opportunity for a relaxed and informative two-way conversation, the substance of which, when sent along to be added to his or her file, may help those of us who read and evaluate their applications to obtain a more complete picture of each candidate.

Applications might be viewed as pieces of a puzzle that the Admission Office attempts to "fit together." It's possible that the results of an interview may turn out to be an important piece of that puzzle. At the least, such interview reports help those of us reading the applications to achieve a more approximate *lifelikeness* of a young man or woman. Experience suggests that rarely is it the case that any single part of an application, standing alone, is sufficient for deciding whether to admit or not admit a given candidate.

## INTERVIEWING GUIDELINES

As a result of various workshops held over the past few years, the National Committee on Schools has developed a general set of guidelines, which are set out below.

### *General Principles*

- All candidates deserve to be treated with respect. The interview is an important element in portraying ----, not only to the candidates who are interviewed, but also, by word of mouth, to their peers, parents, guidance counselors, et alia.
- Interviewers should think of their roles as being more akin to that of "reporters" than to that of "judges."

- Whenever possible, interviews should be conducted in a mutually convenient and comfortable setting, whether it be the interviewer's office, the candidate's home or school, or at a local coffee shop, etc.
- The interview should be a two-way exchange of information. Make sure candidates have an opportunity to ask questions and remind them that they can contact you later with any additional questions that might occur to them.
- If you don't happen to know the answer to a question, simply let the candidate know that and suggest to them that they write directly to the Admission Office.
- Interviewers need to be sensitive to a broad range of backgrounds and/or personalities among our applicants.
- If a candidate declines to have an interview, it is important that you send in an interview form for that candidate, indicating that he or she declined an interview and the reasons, if any, the candidate gave.

### *Sample Interviewing Format*

- Try to put the candidate at ease. Let the candidate know that you are interested in him or her as an individual and not simply as someone about whom you intend to pass along your impressions to the Admission Office.
- Learn about the applicant by starting with such questions as:
  - (a) how they got interested in ----in the first place,
  - (b) what it is about ----that especially appeals to them,
  - (c) which courses they've had to date have interested them most,
  - (d) which activities, of the ones they've been involved in, either at school or outside of school, are ones they'd like to continue in college,
  - (e) how their friends, if asked, would be likely to describe them, and
  - (f) how representative of their abilities they believe their academic record (grades, test scores, etc.) to be.

*(Note: Asking directly about an applicant's grades and test scores is frequently off-putting and can send the wrong signals. It's far better to ask how the student feels about his or her academic achievement, performance on College Board tests, and the like, at which point they're given an opportunity to discuss their scores and grades in context. In any event, the Admission Office will have an applicant's test scores, grades, class rank, etc., on file, and so that's not information we need an ASC member to gather. Indeed, what is especially helpful to us is an interviewer's impressions about an applicant's abilities independent of that applicant's grades and test scores.)*

- If a candidate mentions special interests in any given area (e.g., music, art, athletics, community work, etc.), probe a bit to try to determine just how much depth there is and/or whether there are exceptional talents or skills to be noted and called to our attention. Students with exceptional talents in music or dance should be encouraged to submit tapes along with their applications *directly to the Admission Office*. Students with exceptional talent in the visual arts should be encouraged to submit a portfolio. We forward the tapes or portfolios to the respective departments for review. Students who would like to be considered as varsity athletic prospects should be encouraged to write directly to the coach of the particular sport. The names and addresses of the coaches are listed in the *Admission Information* bulletin.
- If a candidate asks about his or her “chances for admission,” simply let them know that it is impossible to predict. You may wish to point out that a lot will depend on just how many other applications of various kinds the University will receive this year.

For current information about admissions, financial aid, academic programs and requirements, activities, etc., see:

- ----*in Brief*
- *Admission Information*
- *Most Frequently Asked Questions about Applying to ----*
- *A Letter to Prospective Students*

- A nice way to end an interview is by asking the student if there is anything else he or she would like the interviewer to know about that hasn't come up previously in the interview.

### *Interviewing Don'ts*

- *Under no circumstances* should the candidate be asked to provide the interviewer with a copy of his or her application, test scores, or other written materials. Nor should candidates be asked to fill out any sort of questionnaires. It is not the task of interviewers to either collect or evaluate such information and candidates should not be left with the impression that their applications are being reviewed by the interviewer.
- *Under no circumstances* should the interviewer ask a candidate about, or otherwise discuss, or comment upon, favorably or unfavorably, any other candidates.
- Never make negative comments, implied or otherwise, about any other college or university, or about the candidate's secondary school or other local schools.
- Unless a candidate specifically mentions political views or religious beliefs in the course of discussing his or her activities and interests, it is obviously inappropriate to question the candidate about these subject areas.
- Try to avoid showing disappointment at any given answer a candidate may give or any particular weakness a candidate may reveal. Most candidates will be extremely sensitive to how the interviewer reacts to whatever it is they say.
- Candidates should receive only *one* ASC interview, not multiple interviews.
- Whenever possible, avoid interviewing candidates of friends, relatives, business associates, and so forth. Objectivity is important. So is avoiding even the *appearance* of the possible lack of objectivity.
- If your own son or daughter also happens to be an applicant to ----, it's best not to be doing ASC interviews that year. Where the local ASC is shorthanded and your help is needed, at the least it would be inappropriate to interview candidates from the same school your son or daughter attends.
- Avoid making predictions about a candidate's “chances for admission.”

## COMPLETING THE INTERVIEW REPORT FORM

- *Be sure to use the form.* Otherwise, it is impossible to distinguish an ASC report from the tens of thousands of unsolicited letters of recommendation that arrive each year.
- As soon after the interview as possible, while impressions are still vivid, complete the report and send it along to the Admission Office.
- Be sure the report is legible.
- *Avoid Recapping the Application.* It's most helpful when the interviewer is able to convey information about candidates that it is unlikely the Admission Office would be able to glean from simply reading the applications themselves.
- Comment upon any personal qualities or character traits of a candidate that seem to you to particularly stand out.
- Describe any unusual circumstances about the applicant's background, experiences, accomplishments, and the like, that you believe it would be helpful for us to know about.

- Where possible, briefly provide supporting examples of the impressions you've gained about a candidate.
- If you and the candidate don't hit it off, tell us that and take a moment to explain why you think that was so.
- Without exception, the Admission Office treats *all* materials received about applicants as confidential. That said, it is still a sound principle not to write anything in your interview report that you would be embarrassed to see become public. (*For instance, several years ago, an interviewer's secretary mistakenly sent the interview report directly to the candidate rather than to the Admission Office.*) Anything of a highly sensitive nature should be communicated in a separate letter, marked Personal and Confidential, to the Dean of Admission.

Finally, when questions arise, or you need extra interview forms, or whatever, the ASC liaison in the Admission Office is:

Associate Dean

### TIMETABLE

It's really helpful to receive interview reports at as early a date as possible. So, we have set out an "ideal" timetable, knowing that all sorts of exigencies occur (at our end and at yours) that make it impossible to adhere to fully.

#### *Early Decision Candidates*

Our Early Decision application deadline is November 1. Because many ED applications arrive just at the deadline, some interview cards will not reach ASC chairs until mid-November. Since we make our ED decisions by the end of the first week of December, interview reports need to reach us by the end of November. It's a tight schedule and all we expect is that everyone will do the best they can under the circumstances.

#### *Regular Decision Candidates*

Our Regular Decision application deadline is January 2. We should be able to generate interview cards for almost half of the RD applicant group by early December. An early start on interviewing and filing reports on this group would be a big help to us. The cards for the other half of the RD pool are generated from mid-December through January. We need *all* interview reports by the end of February. These are target dates, of course, but to the extent we can meet them it helps the reading and evaluation process enormously.