

If you can get a college interview, don't tank it



The interview was once an important staple of the college admissions process. Young men dressed up in jackets and ties, young women wore short heels, a proper dress, hose and pearls, and they sat down for a formal interview inside the college admissions office.

Not so today. It's just not possible with today's application numbers.

Here are some stats from The Princeton Review's 2018 Best 382 Colleges guidebook on applications received: UCLA: 97,121 (up from 56,670 in 2010); UC Berkeley: 82,518; Boston University: 57,441; New York University: 60,724. Locally, UNC Chapel Hill totaled 34,889, with N.C. State receiving somewhat fewer at 25,929, which is almost identical to the University of South Carolina with 25,736, and Clemson with 22,396.

Obviously with these numbers, colleges no longer have the manpower to manage interviewing each applicant. Many colleges also feel that interviews had long favored the more well-off applicant who could afford to travel to campus and be prepped by professionals.

Currently, there is a much greater reliance on the college application essays, and interviews are required at just a handful of schools. Wake Forest is one school that still places a lot of emphasis on the interview. Wake applicants are required to interview, either in person or via skype.

Today local, volunteer alumni interviews are much more common. They are not required, and students generally need to initiate a request to have one. They typically carry less weight than the old fashioned face-to-face with the director of admissions, but they do help students demonstrate interest in a college.

So, if you have the opportunity, here are some tips to ace that interview:

- Educate yourself about the school. The biggest downfall for most students is that they haven't done their homework or prepared themselves for the interview. Students can count on an interviewer asking them what they think they'd like to major in and why they think the college is a good fit for them. Students need to make sure that their responses aren't generic, i.e., "I'm looking forward to attending the football games and being a part of greek life on campus."

Think of every question as an opportunity to share some slice of your life with your interviewer. Take a look at your resume or brag sheet and identify two or three things that you know you want to share in the interview. Spend time on the college website, and make sure you're comfortable being able to articulate the question about why it's a good fit.

- Resist the temptation to overshare. Some students are so eager to have their interviewer get to know them that they share inappropriate anecdotes that were better left unmentioned.
- Identify questions you'll ask the interviewer ahead of time. Don't try to wing it. All interviewers will end the session with a final, "Is there anything you'd like to ask me or anything I didn't ask you that you'd like me to know about you?" The only unacceptable response to this question is "No."
- Send a hand-written thank you note afterward. Yes, parents, you are right about that one! Students may balk, but there is no question that it is the right thing to do.
 - By LEE SHULMAN BIERER

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