



Alumnae Admission Program Alumnae Interview Tips

The alumnae interviewing process was originally designed to offer prospective students the opportunity to meet a local alumna and share information about herself as well as to learn information about the college. The interview, whether on campus or with an alumna, has grown in importance and is now highly recommended.

Students living within 200 miles of Smith are encouraged to come to campus for an interview. There is a greater chance of the student applying if she has visited the campus. Students living farther away often find it difficult to visit. Consequently, the alumnae interview becomes even more important for these students. Many students who have an on-campus interview are also interested in speaking with an alumna to hear about her personal experiences.

Your observations and comments will become part of students' applications and will serve as a valuable resource about applicants.

Why interview?

- To convey a sense of Smith to the student
- To encourage applications and promote the college – prospects who have alumnae interviews are much more likely to apply to Smith.
- To assist the admission committee in learning more about an applicant

When to interview

You are encouraged to interview both applicants and *prospective* applicants. Your first inquiry printout is mailed at the end of August, although most alumnae committees do not begin to interview students until September or October.

Alumnae interviews may take the form of informational interviews for students whom have not yet applied, but whose names appear as prospects on the printouts. In doing so, you may spark their interest in Smith or convince a student to complete the application.

If a student has already visited campus for an interview, your offer may be declined. On the other hand, she may want to convey information unsaid or make a connection with an alumna. If you live a great distance from Smith and interview a student who has not seen the campus, the interview will be especially important in providing information about the college.

Please pay attention to deadlines for interviews. Deadlines appear on the interview form, varying by decision plan (ED Fall, ED Winter, Regular Decision, January Transfer, September Transfer). We encourage alumnae to interview RD first-year students before February 1 and submit their write-up February 15.

Suggestions for a Successful Interview

Getting Started

- Location is important. Pick an informal neutral setting like a public library or coffee shop or office. If you have several options or suggestions for locations, let the student choose. If you live in an urban area, having a location accessible by public transportation is important. Interviews should not be conducted in the home of the interviewer or the applicant.
- Tell the student that she doesn't have to "dress-up;" she should dress comfortably.
- Schedule interviews with students on a one-to-one basis (one interviewer with one student). Many students will be new to the interview process and they often are intimidated by the presence of more than one alumna.
- Create a welcoming environment for the students. Students will be most forthcoming when the interviewer makes them feel comfortable and appears interested in learning about their interests and experiences.
- Getting started with an interview is often the most difficult part of the conversation. Begin with small talk to make a student – and yourself – feel comfortable. You will be the one setting the tone for the interview.
- Let her know the purpose of an alumnae interview. Find out if this is her first college interview, since that may have a bearing on how nervous she is.

Digging Deeper

- Spend at least 30 minutes with each student. Check your time. Don't be a clock-watcher, but you should be able to have a good conversation in 30-45 minutes. Students should not leave an interview feeling as though they haven't had the time to represent themselves fully nor have their questions answered. (An interview that lasts more than an hour is probably too long, however.)
- Concentrate on learning about the student personally and what sets her apart from her peers.
- If a student is quiet and the conversation is lagging, the interviewer should fill in the gaps by relating some of her own Smith experiences.
- Be non-judgmental. See things from the student's perspective. Be sensitive to cultural, geographic, economic and physical differences. Also, students who are first-generation college bound may be quite unfamiliar with the admission process.
- Watch for leads. Be aware of the difference between a pregnant pause and an embarrassed silence. Give the student time to formulate her responses and watch for opportunities to ask follow-up questions.
- Distinguish between "open" and "closed" questions. Both types are useful during an interview and have different purposes. You should use a mixture of both in the course of the conversation.
- A "closed" question is an objective one that requires a factual, informational response only. Examples of "closed" questions are: "What courses are you taking this year?" "Do you have siblings?"
- An "open" question serves to uncover more of what makes a student interesting. Use open questions to get a sense of her feelings and thoughts. Find out what her aspirations are, if she can imagine what lies ahead for her, what motivates her and why she wants to go to college. Some examples of open questions are:

“Why do you think a liberal arts education is important in this century?” “What do you imagine yourself doing in ten years?”

- Find out about courses. It may be interesting to learn not only what a student is studying but also how and why she selected her courses and what is her favorite.
- Activities are important. Remember, however, that the quantity may be in direct relationship to spare time. A student who is working 20 hours a week to earn money for college or coming home from school to baby-sit younger siblings will not have as many opportunities for co-curricular involvement. Try to determine a student's level of commitment to academics, extra-curricular activities and involvement in her community.

Sample Questions

- How did you learn about Smith?
- Where do you think your academic strengths lie?
- What is important to you in a college? Why?
- What would you do if you had a free day?
- If you could change one thing about your school, what would it be?
- If you had to describe yourself in one word, what would it be?
- What is your favorite subject and why?
- What kinds of activities do you enjoy the most?
- Has your family influenced your college choices?
- Tell me about your family.
- What did you do last summer?
- What do you do for fun?
- What books have had a significant influence on you?
- What individual has had the most influence on you?
- Describe your favorite teacher and why s/he is your favorite.
- Describe the environment in which you learn the best and talk a bit about your learning style.
- If I met a group of your friends, how would they describe you?
- Describe an experience that has shaped you?
- How do you define success? What needs to happen in your life for you to feel successful?
- How do you respond to failure or rejection?
- What do you think will be your greatest adjustment to college?
- Describe your ideal roommate.
- Do you have any questions about a women's college?
- What do you hope to get out of your college experience?

Wrapping it up

- At the end of the interview, ask the student if there is anything that you have not discussed that she thinks the committee ought to know.
- Find out if she expected you to ask any questions that you did not.
- Offer to connect her with current Smith students from your area. With the Smith student's permission, you can offer the prospective student the email address or phone number of a current Smithie. Or perhaps help arrange a campus overnight with a student from your area.
- Be certain you answered all her questions or promise to find out the answers and be back in touch.
- Listen. Listen. Listen.

- Encourage her to see the campus, if possible, before decision time. Remember, if admitted, she will receive an invitation to Open Campus in April.
- Each interview will be different. There is no single format for a successful interview. Your interviews will differ depending on the interests, abilities, activities and backgrounds of the young women you meet.
- Write each student a note, postcard, e-card or email after the interview thanking her for her time and reminding her to stay in touch if she has any further questions.

Parents in the process

- Don't overlook parents. They may accompany their daughter and have questions of their own. Spend time with them *after* you interview the student. The Parent's Brochure has lots of good information.

What to Avoid

- Do not make a student feel that she is inadequate or that she is being judged in a negative way. All students should leave the interview feeling good about themselves and Smith. Most of these students are 17 years old, don't expect them to act like they're 40.
- Try to avoid taking notes during the interview, this can be intimidating and distracting to the student. Only jot down things that you might not remember easily. After the interview is over then write down your impressions and thoughts to use in your write up.
- Don't judge a student based on her appearance, hair color, number of piercings, etc.
- Don't ask for grades or test scores. This is confidential information to be included in the student's application. If a student asks about the importance of test scores in the process, tell her they have been de-emphasized in the process and the admission committee feels that they are the least interesting component. Do remind the student, however, that testing is still required.
- Don't ask what other colleges the candidate is applying to.
- Don't evaluate a student's chances for admission. Make no promises about her application. Each year the applicant pool is different and can be evaluated by the committee only when information is completed on all applicants. Suggest she look at the profile in the viewbook to determine where she fits into the applicant pool.
- Naturally you know Smith best, but don't compare Smith to other colleges even if you are asked. That's the student's job to figure out. You can be positive about Smith without being negative about another college.
- If a student has questions about financial aid, encourage her to contact Student Financial Services directly. Remind her to fill out all the appropriate forms by the deadlines and that, if admitted, she will receive her financial aid package with her letter of admission. The Student Financial Services phone number is 413-585-2530 and the toll free number is 1-800-221-2579 (January 15 – May 15).

The Interview Report

Write your interview report promptly. Although you may not be interviewing several candidates in one day, as we do in the Admission Office, the longer you wait, the more difficult it is to remember the details. **Submit the report as soon as possible.**

Interview report forms can be downloaded from the website or filled out and submitted directly from the web. You can find them on page

<http://www.smith.edu/aac/recruiting.html>

Login smithaac Password Sophia

The interview report is used to:

- Find out something about the student that may not be included in her application such as special circumstances, a language other than English is spoken at home, her enthusiasm for Smith, etc.
- Give us personal insight into the candidate. Is she articulate? Does she show leadership qualities? Was she thoughtful in her answers? What motivates her?
- Make a student "come alive" on paper since we meet only a fraction of the students who apply to Smith.

The interview report is not used to:

- Learn about a candidate's appearance or dress. Smith strictly follows a policy of non-discrimination.

Smith College is committed to maintaining a diverse community in an atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation of differences. Smith College does not discriminate in its educational and employment policies on the bases of race, color, creed, religion, national/ethnic origin, sex, sexual orientation, age, or with regard to the bases outlined in the Veterans Readjustment Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Smith's admission policies and practices are guided by the same principle, concerning women applying to the undergraduate program and all applicants to the graduate programs.

- Determine a candidate's admissibility. We realize that this report is a subjective account of less than an hour spent with a student. We will not deny a student based on a mediocre interview just as we will not admit an academically weak candidate based on a strong interview.

Thank you for all the time and attention you devote to interviewing students. Without your help, we could not enroll the outstanding students who matriculate each year!