

College Beat

College Interviews

By Nancy Federspiel

People often ask me, “Do college admissions offices still offer interviews and do they *really* matter?” The answer is absolutely “yes!” In fact, I would argue that they are more important than ever given the recent trends in college admissions.

As current juniors, seniors and their parents are painfully aware, the college admissions landscape has grown to be very competitive in recent years. An increase in the population of students in this age bracket (a baby “boomlet”), the advent of the Common Application, an increasing percentage of students pursuing college degrees and the increase in the number of colleges each individual applies to have all contributed to this phenomenon.

As a response to the last contributing factor, the increase in the number of colleges applied to per student, colleges have added a category to their selection criteria. This is the “perceived level of interest” that the student demonstrates for their college. Admissions professionals want to admit the students that they think will actually attend. If they perceive the level of interest to be minimal - as if their college is one of twenty the applicant is applying to - they will be less likely to offer an invitation to attend. Conversely, if interest seems high, they will be more likely to extend that invitation.

So how does a student demonstrate that interest? One of the great ways is by participating in an admissions interview. Some basics about interviews will help you navigate this process. First of all, the general rule of thumb for which colleges offer interviews and which don’t often fall along the size factor. Generally, the small and medium sized colleges offer interviews and the large public universities tend not to be able to do so.

Secondly, it is important to understand what kind of interview the college is offering. Is it evaluative or informative? An evaluative interview is one where the interviewer makes comments on your interview which get weighed into the admission decision. An informative interview is a chance for you to learn more about the college but you are not being evaluated as part of the admission decision. Both types of interviews can be conducted by admissions officers, alumnae/ni or students. These factors vary from college to college and you should inquire about the type of interview the colleges on your list offer.

The timing of the interview season also varies from college to college. Some colleges offer interviews after you have applied to the college and some offer them prior to applying – again, something you want to find out for the colleges on your list. If you are planning on applying to a college that is far from home, make sure to inquire about their interview policy before making what could be your only visit to that school.

Lastly, make sure that you go to your interviews prepared. If you go in to an interview armed with information about that particular school, the interviewer will be convinced that you are indeed interested in them. Consider consulting with a counselor to get in-depth information on how to prepare for your interviews. Any effort that you put into researching and preparing for your interviews will be time well spent.

Nancy Federspiel of Bolton is the Director of College Consulting Services. For more information, please visit www.ccs4college.com or call 978.634.1690.

