Preparing for Your Fulbright Campus Committee Interview
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The Fulbright program expects every currently enrolled student—graduating seniors as well as graduate and professional school students—to submit their application for a Fulbright grant through their campus Fulbright Program Adviser (FPA) and to participate in the on-campus evaluation process.

This submission will always involve a formal review of your application materials by a campus committee and a campus committee interview. These assessments provide invaluable information to national screening committees here in the U.S. in the fall, as well as to overseas screening committees in the spring.

For enrolled students, campus committee interviews are extremely important. Not only does this interview allow you to supplement your written and supporting materials personally, but the process allows a committee to assess—in person—the convergence of your project with the Fulbright program’s goals and standards. In a nutshell, the interview provides an opportunity for a committee to gauge how ready you are for the challenges of prolonged immersion in a new culture, as well as how prepared you are to pursue the project you have proposed.

To understand the importance of your campus committee interview, keep one essential fact in mind: this interview will be the only occasion you have in the entire review process, here in the U.S. and overseas, to make a personal case for your abilities to live abroad and to undertake your project successfully. It is essential to know what to expect in your interview, and to take the time to prepare as well as you can.

What to Expect

Campus committee interview procedures vary from institution to institution. Generally, you can expect to meet with faculty members or administrators who have read through your application materials carefully and who are familiar with your field, your destination, and the Fulbright process. FPAs recruit committee members from a range of disciplines and with a variety of international experiences, but all of them will have an interest in the Fulbright program, as well as in your success in applying for a grant.

The Fulbright program expects that each campus committee interview will result in a campus committee evaluation (form #10 in the application) and that these evaluations must address six basic questions for each enrolled candidate:

- What are your academic or professional qualifications to pursue your project?
- How valid and feasible is your proposed project?
- What are your language qualifications to pursue your proposed project?
- Do you seem mature, motivated, and able to adapt to new cultural environments?
- What do you know about your host country?
- What sort of ambassadorial potential do you have in representing the U.S. abroad?

Like many interviews, dialogue with your campus committee may be unpredictable, unfolding in several directions. But unlike many interviews, here you can actually anticipate content—everything you are asked will be designed to address the above questions, usually in the space of about 30 minutes or longer. Because some of this information will be clear in your written and supporting materials, a fair amount of your interview may address questions of personal suitability: Why are you applying? Are you open to new experiences and ideas? How do you meet challenges or difficulties? Do you interact with people easily? Are you eager to go abroad?

You should expect a portion of your campus committee interview to be conducted in the language of your host country, whether or not you will use that language in your everyday work. You should also expect to demonstrate an interest in and knowledge of your host country that goes beyond the specific disciplinary focus of your proposal.
One further note about your interview: you will be evaluated only in comparison with your peers, and only against set standards. In other words, a graduating senior will not be measured against a more advanced graduate student, nor will a graduate student be measured against a graduating senior with less experience. Neither will be measured against other individuals in the same applicant pool. This commitment keeps the playing field level throughout the evaluation process.

**Take Time to Prepare**

Because the campus committee interview is an opportunity for you to make your case in person to the Fulbright program, be sure to invest some time in preparing for it. The degree to which you prepare will speak volumes about your conscientiousness and enthusiasm; it will boost your confidence; and it will help you give articulate answers to committee members’ questions.

A basic starting point in preparing for any interview is self-assessment—think about yourself in a specific setting and reflect on your abilities to be successful in that setting. What experience, knowledge, skills, or special training do you have to make you confident in your ability to pursue your project? What aptitudes, experience, or personal traits do you have to make you confident in your ability to navigate a new cultural environment?

Take some time to review the contents of your application—particularly your statement of proposed study and your curriculum vitae—and be prepared to expand on any of this. If your project gets more refined after you submit your application, be prepared to introduce these developments in your interview. Think about your supporting materials. How do your recommenders know you and what might they say about you? Can you talk about a paper you wrote for a course, a tutoring job, or a performance, even though you may not have written about these experiences yourself? Can you talk about each of the courses on your transcript?

In preparing your application, you will already have done some research on your host country—and host institution, if appropriate—with an eye to the specifics of your project and to current events there. But it won’t hurt to refresh your memory before your interview, especially knowing that the Fulbright program hopes that you will establish connections in your host country beyond the scope of your project. The Internet, your local library, and newsstands are valuable resources.

**Basic Interview Advice**

The best advice for your interview is simple: be yourself. Interviewers expect to meet in person the individual they already have “met” on paper, and you can flounder if you try to be someone you’re not. That said, it’s important to concentrate on being your best self—dress appropriately, arrive on time, be courteous to those you meet, and be honest in your interview. The impression you make with your interviewers really does matter.

Without rehearsing or scripting answers, keep the six basic questions mentioned above in mind as you go into your interview. This preparation will help you focus on the sort of information you share and the points you’ll want to make with your interviewers. Feel free to take a moment to think before you answer a question, or to ask for clarification if you don’t understand a question. If you can’t answer a question, say so—but if you can, connect it to something you do know. If you feel you’ve said something you wish you hadn’t, you can address this issue directly later in the interview. Be sure to address each of your answers to everyone in the room.

It’s natural to feel nervous before an interview. But taking care of yourself beforehand—by preparing, getting a good night’s sleep, eating a healthy meal, and giving yourself time to arrive promptly—will help calm your nerves. If you can be comfortable with the interview as it unfolds, you’ll communicate confidence and self-reliance, qualities that will inevitably serve you well during a year overseas.

**Finally...**

The campus committee interview is a formal part of your Fulbright application, and it is an important component in the evaluation of your candidacy, here in the U.S. and abroad. Treat it accordingly. But also try
to enjoy the experience as much as you can—this is a singular opportunity for you to share your thoughts and aspirations with people who genuinely care about them.

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