

Sarah's UCSD Interview for Fall 2006 Cycle

Please note that the following information will be specific to MY interview experiences. It will most likely apply to the UCSD interviews held in the next few years, but I cannot make any guarantees that they will be exactly the same as mine.

Date: Monday, January 23, 2006

Time: 12:00 PM to 4:00 PM

Location: Pharmaceutical Sciences Building

Application, Interview Notification:

PharmCAS (online application) and UCSD Supplementary Application deadline is November 1! While I filled out my supplementary application online, there was still a signature form and a check that I needed to mail out (postmarked by November 1).

I don't remember receiving an email or any notification from UCSD saying that they received my application...

My interview notice came in the mail (again, no email). Included in the packet was a letter specifying the date and time of my interview, directions, and possible accommodations. AN INTERVIEW ACCEPTANCE FORM is also included and needed to be signed and returned (by mail or fax) ASAP.

Admissions notifications will be in late March / early April. For the most part, if applicants have a choice to go to UCSD and another school, many applicants choose the other school (UCSF or USC, for instance). Thus, if you want to go to UCSD, your chances are higher than 25% (60 class size / 240 interviewed). UCSD usually has to go into their waiting list in order to fill their class, so don't get discouraged.

Preparation Prior to the (Open File) Interview:

1. Reviewed application materials
The very first comment my interviewer made to me was about my application! Be sure you know what you wrote in your essays in case you are asked about them!
2. Reviewed UCSD pharmacy website (www.pharmacy.ucsd.edu)
Learn facts specific to the school that you are attending. ALWAYS know why you want to go to this school or why this school should accept you (i.e., what can you contribute to this school). Reviewing their website will also help you ask meaningful questions (NEVER come to an interview without questions to ask).
3. Looked over materials from SDN (www.studentdoctor.net)
In the upper right corner of this website, there is a drop-down box that will let you jump to "Pharmacy Interview Feedback." You can pick a pharmacy school and read other people's interview experiences at that school. This will prepare you for the types of questions you will be asked at your interview and might tell you the essay prompts from previous years.
4. Looked up articles covering major news in pharmacy
One of the big issues this year was the switch in to Medicare Part B. For easy-to-find articles on big topics in pharmacy today, browse the "Health" link under www.cnn.com or search for keyword "pharmacy." This should give you at least a starting ground for current events that you should be knowledgeable about.
5. Relax! =)
UCSD's interview process is very laidback, especially compared to other schools. They really just want to get to know you here, not grill you. Also, be sure to eat enough to make sure you're not hungry, but not too much to the point that you feel queasy when you get nervous.

How the Interview is Structured:

- 240 applicants invited to interview
- 2 sessions a day, around 30 people a session = 4 different interview dates
 - My interview date was scheduled alphabetically by my last name, so I ended up on the 2nd session of the 2nd interview day. So, don't be worried that your interview is on the last day—it has no relevance to your quality as an applicant.
 - Also, UCSD and UCSF coordinate their interview days so that they don't overlap, so you don't need to worry about that.
 - Sessions are from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM and 12:00 PM to 4:00 PM. Plan to be there the entire time. Drinks (coffee, lemonade, water) and snacks (granola bars or something like that) were provided.
- 1st hour (12:00 PM to 1:00 PM for me): presentation by the Assistant Dean and/or Dean of the Pharmacy School about UCSD
 - At the end, essay questions and surveys are handed out.
- 45-minute block for the actual interview
 - The group of interviewees are broken down into 4 different time blocks according to your last name again (1:00 PM—1:45 PM, 1:45 PM—2:30 PM, 2:30 PM—3:15 PM, and 3:15 PM—4:00 PM).
 - Most interviews are 2 on 1: 1 faculty + 1 student and you. However, if your interview is near the end of the day, you might just end up with 1 faculty member interviewing you (which is what happened to me).
- Rest of the day: writing your essay (3 pieces of wide-ruled, legal pad paper were provided), talking to current pharmacy students that come in, taking a tour of the building
 - There's plenty of time to write your essay! Take your time and talk to the students that come in. They are super-friendly and are willing to talk honestly about course load, how they made their pharmacy school decisions, pretty much anything. They've been through what you're going through, so make use of them!

My Interview Experience:

Sunday

Since my interview date was on Monday, I actually arrived to the campus on Sunday. They have van tours on Sundays at 2:00 PM (among many other tours), so if you've never toured the campus, I would recommend that you take one—it really is a beautiful campus (<http://admissions.ucsd.edu/tours/>).

They have a brand new Pharmaceutical Sciences Building that just opened at the beginning of the year (at my interview, it was so new you could still smell the paint on the walls). This building is the first of several buildings that will become the Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences. Many of these construction projects (including the main 250-person auditorium lecture hall) are slated to be finished by the summer, and so should be available for Fall 2006 and later.

There are several hotels right next to campus (Hyatt and Radisson, I believe), so if you need an off-campus place to stay, there are lots of places nearby. This information should also come in your interview notification packet.

Monday

Groom and dress nicely! (Duh.) Just FYI, everyone at my interview session except for one person was dressed in some variation of a nice black suit.

I came pretty early – at 10:00 AM for my 12:00 PM interview. There was no check-in process. There were two other students there waiting in the lobby – one was an out-of-state student who flew in early, and the other had come with his friend for his 8:00 AM interview and stayed around for his own 12:00 PM interview. There was not that much to do: tour the school, find something to eat,

tour the building, talk with other interviewees. I did run across a couple of current pharmacy students, including one soon-to-be graduating 4th year. They were really friendly and stayed to answer some questions and to reassure you about the interview. The 4th year even talked about his experiences studying for the board exam. He said the board exam is a piece of cake compared to the finals that you have during school.

12:00 PM – 1:00 PM

They called us into the applicant room which is where you will be staying except when you are needed for your actual interview. In this room there are refreshments such as drinks and snacks for you to eat. The assistant dean gave a Powerpoint presentation outlining UCSD's school of pharmacy (curriculum, accreditation, etc.) and the dean gave a short speech about the development of the school of pharmacy as a program. Afterwards, a survey was handed out for you to fill out at the end of the day (did the interview process go smoothly for you, etc.) and the essay question was announced. My essay question was: "If you could invite any three people (living, dead, fiction, real, etc.) to a dinner party, who would they be and why?" Three sheets of wide-ruled, legal pad paper (no margins) were also passed out in a mini-packet. You also get a little card with your name on it that tells you what time your 45-minute interview will be. The dean and assistant dean then leave. Interviewers came to pick up the first wave of interviewees (1:00 – 1:45 PM), and current pharmacy students trickled in. Feel free to ask them any questions you might have. There really is no rush to finish the essay since you have about 2 hours to do it in.

1:00 PM – 3:15 PM

Since my interview wasn't until the last block of time in the day, I had several hours of uninterrupted time. The pharmacy students that were in the room volunteered to take us on a tour of the building, so we went and did that. Then, most people got started on their essays, while others chose to ask the pharmacy students questions. I chose to ask questions first. The pharmacy students are really super-nice and willing to answer any question you have honestly. One student told me about his experiences being on the wait list until August when he finally got an acceptance notice. The others told me about their experiences with having classes with medical school students (2nd years and up have integrated classes with the medical school) and how the classes are graded on a curve. Most importantly, **the majority of pharmacy students told me that if you are looking to just get your Pharm D. degree as quickly and as painlessly as possible so you can just go into commercial/retail pharmacy, UCSD is most likely NOT THE PLACE FOR YOU.** They told me honestly that the curriculum at UCSD is one of the hardest, if not the hardest, curriculum in California. You will be forced to learn a great deal more than you need to know if you just want to be a retail pharmacist.

Overall, this is a good time to ask the pharmacy students questions or discuss your worries about the admissions process. Don't know how to decide between schools? Ask them how they ended up picking UCSD. Unsure of your interviewing ability? Ask them for some tips – after all, they just went through the process a year ago. Make sure you don't slack on your essay, though. There was one girl who had an interview at 3:15 PM, but didn't finish her essay before her interview. She had to come back to the applicant room after her interview at 4:00 to finish her essay, and there was no one left. FYI, out of the five people I asked, overall essay length ranged from 1.5 pages to 3 pages.

3:15 PM – 4:00 PM

This was my interview time, and yes it did take all 45 minutes. The interview rooms are on the second and third floors, so you will ride an elevator to your personal interview room. I only had one faculty interview me instead of the normal 1 faculty + 1 student. They will usually try to engage you in an informal-feeling conversation during the walk to the interview room to try and relax you. They really put an effort into making it not feel like an "interrogation." This interview is OPEN FILE and they do have your application right in front of them when you're being interviewed, so be sure to review your application materials before the interview. There is not a set checklist of questions that they will ask you. Normally, it will start off with something like "Tell me about yourself," and they will take something from what you said and ask you about that next. **Therefore, this style of interviewing makes it very easy for you to lead it to where you want! Sell yourself!** If you want to emphasize your academic record, lead the conversation that way. If you want to stress your

volunteer hours in the hospital, mention how much you enjoy helping people, etc. If you want to stress your leadership record, bring up the fact that you are enjoy being challenged and that you handle responsibility well. The interviewers will pick up on the direction that you're going and ask you more questions about it. You can then tell them about all the wonderful things that you've done in that area – things that will make you stick out and be remembered.

Here are the general questions that I was asked (the ones that I remember, anyways):

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why pharmacy?
3. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
4. Where do you think pharmacy is headed towards in the future?
5. What is one weak point that you perceive about pharmacy currently?
6. I see that you are more adept at X (for instance, X could be research). How would you feel about doing Y (Y being working with patients, etc.)?
7. How do you feel about working in groups?

Note that I was NOT asked about current events in pharmacy...

At the end of the interview, you will be asked if you have any questions. **BE SURE THAT YOU HAVE QUESTIONS TO ASK!** You want to show that you actually are interested in attending their school and that you aren't just there because you applied to every school in California...

After your interview, you will go to the check-out room which is where you will turn in your essay and survey.

Final Points:

1. Class size is forever fixed at 60. UCSD is asking for accreditation for a 60-student per year class size, so if you were expecting the class size to match UCSF's (122 class size), it will not happen. So, yes, UCSD will be one of the most difficult schools to get into, partially due to its small class size.
2. 40% of the pharmacy curriculum is permanently integrated with the medical school. This was not just a temporary measure while the pharmacy school buildings are being built; this is how the curriculum is structured. Take into account that UCSD's curriculum is one of the most difficult and most rigorous out of all the schools in California. Know what you are getting yourself into. Is this what you want out of pharmacy school?
3. Prepare well! Take an interest in the school that you are interviewing for. Know yourself and the reasons why you want to go into pharmacy. Know the answers to the basic questions that you are nearly guaranteed to be asked (see above questions).
4. Relax! This interview is designed to see how clearly you can get your point across (both in talking and on paper), not on testing your knowledge of current events or how you would fix Medicare or what diversity in pharmacy means to you. Plan your thoughts out and make sure they lead where you want them to go.

If you have any more questions, please feel free to email me at sarah.pham@ucla.edu!

Good luck on your application process!

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