

Sarah's UCSF 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 UCSF interviews held in the next few years, but I cannot make any guarantees that they will be exactly the same as mine.

Date: Thursday, February 9, 2006

Time: 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM

Location: Millbury Student Union

Application, Interview Notification:

PharmCAS (online application) and UCSF Supplementary Application deadline is November 1! However, UCSF is not rolling, so keep your application as long as you need to in order to make sure that it is exactly what you want to turn in. PharmCAS application was submitted online, but the supplementary and letters of recommendation need to be completed, printed out, and mailed (postmarked by November 1) along with your application fee. Note that there is a cover sheet that goes with each letter of recommendation that needs to be filled out by each recommender and that the supplemental application is really, really, really long.

I received an email from UCSF saying that they received my application, but this didn't come until about a month after I mailed my application.

My interview notice came in the mail along with an email. Included in the packet was a letter specifying the date and time of my interview. INSTRUCTIONS FOR ACCEPTING YOUR INTERVIEW are also included. A website and a "personal reply code" are provided for you to login and accept your interview time.

Admissions notifications will be in late March / early April. Chances are around 50% acceptance if you get an interview (122 class size / ~250 interviewed).

Preparation Prior to the (Open File) Interview:

1. Reviewed application materials
This is an open file interview! They will ask you questions from your application. For this part, focus mainly on your supplemental application rather than your PharmCAS application.
2. Reviewed UCSF pharmacy website (www.pharmacy.ucsf.edu)
Any admissions officer from UCSF will be proud to tell you that nearly anything you want to know about their school is on their website. UCSF does have an extremely comprehensive website that they update frequently, so be sure to browse through the site if you have any questions. Also, 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 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! =)

UCSF's interview process, while not the most laidback one I've been to, is not too bad. Things may feel a little more impersonal here because they interview a lot of people on any given interview day. However, your personal interview time should be around 10 people, which is rather small. 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:

- ~250 applicants invited to interview
 - My interview date was scheduled alphabetically by my last name, so I ended up on the 2nd to last 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 last for about 2 hours. Plan to be there the entire time. No food was provided in the essay writing or interview room.
 - UCSF sets aside special rooms called "chat rooms" where you can talk to current pharmacy students. This was actually in an entirely different building across the street from the essay/interview rooms, and food and drinks were provided there.
- ~1st hour (~2:45 PM to 4:00 PM for me): check-in, essays for 45 minutes
 - When you check-in for your interview, they will give you a packet containing a welcome letter, some information on financial aid, a map, and a sheet detailing your prerequisite status (what classes you've taken, what classes you still need, etc.).
 - After that, you wait for the rest of your interview group to arrive, then you are taken into a room to do your essay.
 - After you are finished, you wait in a different room for your interview.
- 45-minute block for the actual interview
 - Everyone in your group interviews at approximately the same time.
 - 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.
- Rest of the day: your time
 - can be used to take a tour of the campus, talk to a counselor about your prerequisite status and classes you have left to take, go to the "chat rooms," etc.

My Interview Experience:

Thursday

Since my interview date was on Thursday afternoon at 3:00 PM, I scheduled a flight out from LAX to Oakland Airport for 11:00 AM (Southwest Airlines, ~\$130). However, of course, my flight was delayed for about 45 minutes, so I actually didn't get there until around 12:30 PM (the flight takes around 45 minutes to an hour). After that, I took a Super Shuttle (which I pre-arranged) to the campus (~\$25 one-way). This shuttle ride also took about an hour since the campus is a good distance away and the shuttle had to drop off several people before me. I arrived on campus at the Student Union around 1:30 PM, ate some lunch, changed into my interview clothes (so they don't get wrinkly on the plane), and browsed the campus until 2:30 PM. At 2:30 PM, I checked in at the desk set up in the Student Union and received my packet of interview materials (welcome letter, prerequisite status, financial aid information, map of campus, survey). My check-in people were current students, so feel free to ask them questions if they don't look busy. They also tell you about the "chat rooms" and any other presentations or activities that UCSF might be having that day. They also tell you to meet back at the check-in desk 15 minutes before your interview time. Feel free to mingle and talk to other interviewees until this time.

2:45 – 3:35 PM

Everyone in your interview group should be present 15 minutes before your scheduled interview time. If everyone is there by this time, THEY WILL START YOU ON YOUR ESSAY AHEAD OF TIME. (This does not mean that you get extra time though). So we received our essays around 2:50 PM. The essay consists of 3 essay topics and a box of preset size for you to write your essay in. The box is about 2/3 to 3/4 of a normal page long, so plan your essay accordingly! My three essay choices (paraphrased) were:

1. Conscientious objectors. Should the government acknowledge their beliefs as valid? Why or why not?
2. Dead languages. Languages such as Latin are no longer spoken today (which is why they are called dead languages). However, they are still being taught in schools today. Do you think that teaching languages that are no longer spoken is a good idea or not? What kind of benefits do you see in still teaching these languages?
3. Students and academics. Do you think it would be a good idea to allow for students to have a say in the curriculum or in how their classes are taught? Why or why not? What kind of advantages and disadvantages are there to enabling students to decide such matters?

I picked the second essay topic since I've actually taken five years of Latin, but honestly it did seem like the easiest. Wendy's essay topics (her interview was the day after mine) seemed a lot harder, so I guess it's a matter of luck which essay topics you get. Essay topics DO CHANGE from day to day, but I believe they are the same for each interview group on a given day. You have 45 minutes to write your essay (it is timed, although not stringently to the minute since I think we got around 2 extra minutes). Be sure to keep your essay in the box! They reiterate the importance of this in your essay instructions. (My essay took up the entire space, right down to the bottom edge of the box...) The atmosphere in the essay room is very studious, unlike at UCSD. Everyone is busy concentrating on writing their essay, and no one talks during this time. There isn't a proctor or anything watching over you (someone comes in to hand out the essays, leaves, and then comes back in to collect them), so I don't know if talking is "not allowed" or if people didn't feel like talking.

After time was called (around 2:35 PM for me), the essays were collected, and we were directed to wait outside the interview room. Most people took this time to go to the bathroom before their interview.

3:45 – 5:00 PM

Depending on whether UCSF Pharmacy was able to book separate rooms or not, your interviews will either take place in individual rooms or in one giant room with a bunch of booths that have curtains separating them. My interview date had the booths, while Wendy's had rooms. The downside to having booths is that there are people interviewing two feet away from you with only a curtain separating you. This can be very distracting for some people since you can hear other people talking around you. Since we started our essay a little ahead of schedule, we sat in the waiting area outside of the booths until ~4:00 PM when our student interviewer came to get us. You can actually hear the group before you getting interviewed during this time, so you can kind of get a feel for the type of questions you'll get during your own interview.

The interview does take around 45 minutes, although it was more common for my interview time for the interview to take longer than 45 minutes than shorter. 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. Normally, it will start off with something like "Tell me about yourself." However, the interview at UCSF does have more of a "checklist of questions to ask" format than UCSD. For my interview, they had previously marked down parts of my application that they wanted to ask me about. As a result, the interview doesn't really "flow" from one question to another because the questions they ask may not have to do with each other really.

A thing to note is that, according to studentdoctor.net (see their UCSF pharmacy interview feedback), UCSF is famous for its "situational" questions such as "what if" or "what would you do in this case." They're not really questions that have right answers, but they want to see that you can handle a problem or challenge that can come up in the pharmacy field.

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 the strengths and weaknesses of pharmacy?
4. Where do you think pharmacy is headed towards in the future?
5. What is an obstacle in the future of pharmacy?
6. Where do you see yourself / what do you want to do in 5 years (after you get your degree)?
7. What are two traits a pharmacist needs to have?
8. How do you relax / de-stress?
9. (Situational question) What would you do if a patient walked in to the pharmacy you are working at and tells you that they were prescribed the wrong medication?

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 go back to the check-in table to fill out and turn in your survey. Also, you can take this time to go to the "chat rooms" or take a tour of the campus. However, by this time on my interview day, no one was left in the "chat rooms" and all the food was gone, so if you are interested in going to this, you might want to think about going before your interview if you have a late afternoon interview.

Final Points:

1. Plan your trip accordingly! Make sure you have enough time to drive/fly up to UCSF. If flying, be sure to take into account airport security lines, flight delays, driving time to and from the airport to the school, etc. Also, I've been told that parking at UCSF is horrible, so be sure to take that into account (time to find a parking space, take a cab, etc.).
2. Class size is fixed at 122. UCSF is a difficult school to get into due to its prestige and reputation. However, if you make it to the interview, be proud! You've made it through several cuts and the odds have dropped from about 1:10 to about 1:2. You have an awesome chance of making it in if you get an interview.
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, review your application, and practice situational questions.

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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