

OVERVIEW AND ADVICE

I applied the summer of my third year and in my opinion, it was a stressful experience. PharmCAS comes out on June 1st and it's important to not procrastinate. Everyone and their mother will tell you that you have plenty of time, but don't listen. Do you want to sacrifice getting into a great school because you're tired and lazy? No, I don't think so. The application cycle requires you to be motivated. Keep in mind that there are people out there who finished their PharmCAS application by the end of June and July. I turned in my application by the end of August. The deadline is November 1st. The hardest part was getting the letter of recommendations for PharmCAS. PharmCAS is the application service that sends your primary application to the schools you apply to. PharmCAS requires the professor to fill out an extra form that assesses your skills in and out of the classroom and has the professor rank you (i.e. top 5%, 10% etc) for each category. Print that sheet out and have the professor fill it out, in addition to writing the regular letter of recommendation. I had three LORs sent in: one from my community service advisor, my stats professor, and a pharmacist I worked with at the hospital. Make sure to ask early because some professors require 2-3 months to write one.

Each school has a secondary application they require, in addition to the PharmCAS application. The hard part is that you do both applications at the same time. You want to send in your PharmCAS app first, and then tackle the secondary apps. But they're both due by November 1st. USC and UOP are rolling admissions so you definitely want to turn in both of the apps before November 1st. UCSD and UCSF are not rolling so you can turn in their secondary apps October 31st and your application will be considered on time. Therefore, it makes sense to tackle the rolling apps before the UC apps. I talked to a USC admissions counselor and when evaluating a student, she only looks at the USC secondary personal questions. She only looks at the PharmCAS personal statement (PS) when she wants more information about the student. Therefore, while you need to spend a lot of time making your PS great, don't waste extra time making it perfect if it's the only thing holding you back because it might not even be looked at. But every school is different and, as a result, you need to be prepared. UCSF has a bear of an application so check it out early. They require a "Candidate's Statement" (i.e. a SECOND personal statement). The secondary Q's are more personal and they are looked at closely. Have friends and family edit your drafts. Do not have grammatical errors or your app will be thrown to the side. If you do well on your apps, the interviews will be on their way.

First and foremost, interviewing can be very tiring. UCLA started at the end of September and I had two interviews in November (Touro and USC). By the end of November, I knew that I was going to USC, which was a great relief. December was a stressful month because I waited for interview notices from UCSD and UCSF. The letters came during winter break so I had my friend open them while I listened on the phone at home in NorCal. I prepped for my UC interviews in January. I absolutely recommend doing mock interviews at the Career Center or with friends. I did a mock with a friend for my USC interview and that question (USC or UCSF?) actually came up. I interviewed at UCSD (Monday) and UCSF (Friday) of the same week in mid-February. That was slightly stressful. By mid-March, I got an acceptance email from UCSD. Found out from UCSF at the end of March (the day before my two finals). Yes, I winged both of them.

March was, by far, the longest month of my life but it was well worth it in the end. At least Spring quarter will be enjoyable. And that was my year in a nutshell. =)

With every interview, you go in, try your best and hope that your best will get you to the end. Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't. That's life. Nothing is ever guaranteed. Someone is always better than you. At the same time, you're always better than someone else. It's a cycle and we all have our place in the world. You can't let your life be decided by others. At UCLA, we're surrounded by many competitive UCLA pre-meds who don't want to help others because their chances of getting an A might be jeopardized. It's all shady business but, in college, I learned to put aside all that pettiness. I understood that to truly excel, I needed to compete for personal best, not against others. At interviews, you will run into UCLA students everywhere. Try to make friends with people who are interviewing because it makes the interviewing experience less stressful and more fun. These are people who are going through the same situation as you and can understand your concerns every step of the way.

The competition is getting harder every year. I remember pharmacists telling me that pharmacy school used to be a back-up plan for individuals who couldn't get into medical school. Nowadays, many of my peers are choosing pharmacy school over med school, as did I, for various reasons. Looking at demographics, you can see that women are making up 70% of the class. The prime reason why women are flocking into pharmacy is the fact that you will have time to start and raise a family, whereas with medicine, you will always be on-call and patients come first. This is a huge generalization but most people will agree with me on that statement. A friend who goes to UCSF med asked me, "Don't you want your career to be your life?" and I answered, "No. Not really. Don't get me wrong. I want to love what I do...be great at what I do but I think there's more to life than work." It's the question of whether you live to work or work to live. And in my case, I'm always going to choose the latter. A cliché but life is definitely too short to be taken for granted.

For those who are pursuing pharmacy school because they think it is an easy field, you better switch now. I talked to a student at UCSF and he said, "Every quarter you say 'This is the hardest quarter of my life!' but then you find yourself repeating that exact same statement the next quarter. We will suffer and survive together. In the end, it's well worth the effort." I like to think that we're heading into a field that's dramatically changing for the better. Pharmacists should be respected just as much as anyone else holding a doctorate in health. Seeing how prevalent medications are in today's society, as future "drug experts," we have the responsibility to share our knowledge and help patients make the best decision with their drug regimen and therapy. The future is bright for all of us and, hopefully, we'll be colleagues one day.

Good luck to all my fellow Bruins and future pharmerms.

Sincerely,

Wendy Sui