

MY ADVICE AND SCHOOL OVERVIEW 2007-2008

Note: I only applied to UCSF, UCSD, UOP, and USC and is a rough overview. For more in-depth information about these schools, review Sarah and Wendy's Testimonials.

PHARMCAS comes out on June 1st, however being that I was a junior at UCLA and we still had finals until mid-June, I didn't even venture to the website or open an account until after my finals were over. That being said, if many of you use the popular sdn.com (a great resource by the way) you'll see many people during this time mention how they'll be ready to submit their application by the end of June. Don't be intimidated, you'll get around to your application.

I started my application roughly towards the end of June, first filling out the application itself with my personal information, courses, and extracurriculars. Some key things to note about this part:

- **Courses section** - you must list by the school you attended first and then subsequent schools. I took two summer courses at a community college prior to my freshman year at UCLA so I had to list those first.
- **Courses section** - be careful with the units and whether you're listing them in semester or quarter units especially if you attended more than one school.
- **Courses section** – (this applies to those who still have courses to take while applying) make sure to include all the courses you still need to take as required by ALL the schools you're applying to. Some schools will require a course that another school doesn't but include to anyways.
 - For example, USC requires interpersonal communication (commstds10) while UCSF and UCSD require oral communication (speech 1 aka commstds1). At UCLA, commstds10 also fulfills a GE requirement so I decided to take it first and wait on speech. For speech, I would wait until my senior year to take it if I got into UCSF. So I listed it as a "Planned Course"
- **Extracurriculars section** – make sure to list your extracurriculars by order of importance to YOU!!! The first thing doesn't have to be pharm related.

My personal statement (ps) for PHARMCAS was a work in progress. It's difficult to get all the information in without going over the character limit. YES, that's right, character limit not word limit. I believe my year the limit was 4500 characters. However, when first writing your ps, just write!!! Don't worry about the limit just yet, you can always cut down later. My advice for the ps:

- **Paint a Picture** - when a person reads your ps they should really get a sense of who you are. Use your experiences and life lessons as things to represent you in your ps.
- **Why Pharmacy?**- The question doesn't really change through the years, so for those of you reading this and aren't applying just yet, I want you to think about how you would answer this question; Why Pharmacy? Really think about it and think about what you have done to SHOW why you want to have a career in pharmacy.
- **Do Not Read Other Peoples' Personal Statement!!!**- I cannot stress this enough because reading someone else's, either a friends or one from those books can really mess with how your ps will turn out. My advice is to write yours FIRST, then if you really need

some help with structure or such, then look at them. But my suggestion is just don't do it at all.

- **Have Others Read It-** have those who have been through the process and who you TRUST to read your ps. Don't have just anyone read it because remember, this information is personal and you don't want someone else stealing your ideas. Sadly, this does happen. In addition, I tried the career center's ps proof reading; it was nice because I got some insight into my essay from someone who doesn't know me. But remember, each counselor is subjective to what he or she likes so don't think you have to use or take out everything they say.
- **Take Your Time-** Don't rush to finish your ps because there is a tier deadline coming up. However don't neglect your ps either so use your best judgment on whether your ps is complete enough to submit before the deadline or whether it's more important to spend a little more time on it.

(What is a tier? UOP has tiers to represent cutoff dates for which interview sessions an applicant is eligible for. For example, UOP has 3 tiers, if you submit your application in the first tier, it will be considered for the first set of interviews).

For the Letters of Recommendations (LOR), I had a pharmacist, one of my science professors who knew me very well, and a life skills professor who was also my supervisor for the SHA program in the dorms. I suggest having all the recommendations sent via email. That is, you provide PHARMCAS with your recommenders' emails and phone numbers. PHARMCAS will automatically send your recommender an email asking them to fill out the rating form (PHARMCAS asks your recommenders to rate you on a basis of a few characteristics) and to send a recommendation. If your recommender doesn't feel comfortable with the online method, it's fine because my pharmacist sent mine via mail. I gave him a pre-stamped envelope and a printout of the rating form for him to fill out. The reason I suggest email is because you don't have to worry about it getting lost in the mail and when it's via email, you can see whether they submitted your recommendation by the date you asked right away. That being said, always ask for a recommendation in advance because your professors and pharmacists are busy people so they need time to write it. And if they happened to forget, you have some leeway in terms of time for them to write you one.

THE SCHOOL INTERVIEWS

The previous interview experiences on this website from Wendy and Sarah are still accurate except for a few minor things. But the overall format of the interview for each of these schools that they described two years ago is still the same.

USC

I submitted all my applications materials for USC in August. My PHARMCAS ps was

submitted mid-august and about a week later I submitted my USC Supplemental at the end of the month. I did them consecutively because sometimes I would get stuck on the PHARMCAS ps and then switch over to my USC one. The USC supplemental was different my year than Wendy and Sarah's years; in my opinion there was a lot of confusion with it so I'm not sure if they'll continue to use it but if they do, here's the layout;

- It is a two part supplemental: The graduate application + the Pharm.D. program specific one.
- First you fill out the USC graduate application with the same exact information as you filled out on PHARMCAS; this was definitely a bit frustrating. You also have to upload a CV or Resume (make sure you have an updated and professional one geared towards pharmacy) at this point. Once this portion is completed, you submit it.
- Once you have completed the graduate application you will be given the Pharm.D. part (do not confuse this with the pharmacology PhD tab you will see on the side of the graduate school application). This second part of the application will have your supplemental questions and LOR information.
- For USC, they do not use the PHARMCAS LOR or transcripts so you have to send copies of these directly to the pharmacy school. So remember to tell your recommenders they'll need to send two to two different locations.

I received an invite for the first interview session (November) pretty early, around late-September to early October. At that point, I started to practice my interview skills. By using the questions on sdn.com, I got a sense of what I should focus on. **YOU NEED TO DO SOME PRACTICE!!!** Even if it's with a friend or at the career center (I did this and it was helpful so I suggest doing the pre-health mock interviews) because you may think you know why you want to be a pharmacist but when under pressure and asked to state the specifics, you might fumble. You can't just say, "I want to help people." However, don't memorize your answers, just have a general idea of what you want to say. I know my answers to the same question were slightly different each and every time. In addition, I kept up with pharmacy and health topics in the news. I used CNN health, NY times health, and then goggled some topics like Medicare Part D.

My interview was at 8:00am so I arrived there about 15mins early and parked at the meters at the bottom of the Biggy Parking Structure. USC is very efficient with their interview process so you won't be there the whole day; I put 3 hours worth of quarters in. Current students will be in the lobby to talk to you before the interview starts. Once the process begins, you will be taken into one of their lecture halls where you will be given a talk to "calm you down" by one of the faculty. It actually made us more nervous though. Once his ~15min talk was done, students came in to take you to your interview room.

I had a recent USC alumni and current pharmacy student as my interviewers. My interview took place upstairs in one of the office rooms. They first ask you, "how was the commute" or something else to calm you down. Then there were of course the general questions:

Why do you want to be a pharmacist?

Where do you think the field will be heading?

But most of the questions will be geared towards your application. I noticed they kept looking at the clock to make sure they didn't run over the time. I think I answered the questions too quickly because at the 10min mark, they ran out of questions to ask so they sat there for a bit thinking of some more. I probably should have slowed down. I then asked my questions, one for each interviewer. I basically didn't prepare these in advance, but catered my questions to who was

interviewing me and to these I was genuinely interested in learning about the school. REMEMBER, YOU'RE INTERVIEWING THE SCHOOL TOO. IT IS A TWO WAY STREET.

Once we reached the 20min mark the student that interviewed me took me back down to the same lecture hall we were in to prepare for the writing portion. Again, this part doesn't change so please refer to Wendy and Sarah's experiences. After the writing portion was done, current students came in to answer any questions we had and then we were done! I was out of the door in ~2hours.

I got my acceptance letter the Saturday before finals of Fall Quarter.

UOP

I submitted the UOP application by the end of August as well for the 2nd tier. I kind of rushed to do this one after my USC application partly because it was more of my backup school. I received a letter for a January interview in December, but I decline the interview because at that point I had already gotten into USC. Due to the location and the type of program (3 years is nice, but I don't think it was for me), I chose USC over UOP.

UCSD

I completed my application close to the November 1st deadline since their school is not rolling. On their supplemental, there is one main question regarding, "Please describe how you have explored Pharmacy to determine if it was the field for you?" And then smaller sections after submitting this portion that ask about your school organizations, hobbies, community service, intellectual interests, and an optional section. UCSD really tries to get to know who you are through their application because they only have about ~220 interview spots (the number my year) to fill their 60 student class.

I received my letter for an interview at UCSD around mid-December. I remember it was winter break and was thankful that I used my parent's address. NOTE: if you plan to go home for the winter break and home is not nearby, you might want someone to check your mail for letters from schools if you're having all your stuff sent to your UCLA address. My parents live 30mins from UCLA, so having it sent to their place was a safe bet, I could easily go home and get them.

My interview was the second week in Feb. on a Monday. All I remember was how stressful it was because I had UCSD on Monday, Tuesday was my MCDB midterm and UCSF was that Friday. This made things extremely hectic.

Again, I prepared for the interview in a similar way to the USC interview with questions from sdn.com and thinking about my answers to these questions rather than rehearsing them. You won't get the same exact questions, but some will be similar. After a bit of time practicing you get a feel of how to answer the questions thrown at you in a professional manner. In addition, I researched the school by looking on the website and speaking to current students.

Speaking to current students was probably the most helpful thing because not only did I really get to learn about the school, but it made me excited about their program. UCSD can be considered a fairly new school and an innovative one at that by integrating 1st year med students and 2nd pharm students in their curriculum.

On the day of the interview, mine was at 8am but we had to check-in before then. Since I didn't want to commute from LA that morning, I slept over at a friend's place and just woke up early to get prepared and drive over. When I checked in at roughly 7:45am, I waited in the lobby

with other interviewees for the interview to begin. At 8am, we were escorted to a room nearby with long tables and nice chairs (conference type room) where we would listen to a 45min long presentation about the school. This sounds boring, but in actuality, it was extremely interesting and I was impressed. It was at that moment that I really thought UCSD could be the pharmacy school for me. I didn't know much about the school prior, but the presentation really opened my eyes.

After the presentation, we were given our essay topic and a booklet to write in. My topic was, "If you could put anyone's face on Mt. Rushmore, who would it be?" Don't be frightened by the essay, we were even told the essay is random for each interview day and the topics are chosen by whatever comes in the associate dean's mind. I believe a prior interview day had, "What type of superpower would you have?" Then once receiving our essay we were also given a small card indicating your interview time. Though my interview time on my letter said 8am, the actual interviews range from 9am to 11am I believe. I was lucky and my card said 9am, so I was in the first group to be interviewed.

After being told that we could write our essay wherever we wanted and take as long as we want until 11:30am (UCSD is very relaxed about their essay portion- there's granola bars and beverages in the conference room. USC and UCSF are more stringent on their essay portion), a UCSD Med Center Staff Pharmacist came into the room and called out my name.

We went to a small room and started the interview. I only had the staff pharmacist as my interviewer probably because my interview was so early, all the UCSD students were still in class. Normally you would have one faculty and one student. My interviewer was very pleasant and the interview went very well. He asked questions such as, "How do you see your role as a pharmacist and if I were to listen to what was playing on the radio in your car right now, what would it be? Then most of the questions were based off my application. This was my most calm interview experience; probably because my interviewer was incredibly welcoming.

When I finished my interview, I asked him questions off the top of my head, and then he escorted me back to the conference room where I would start my essay and he would interview another student for the next interview time, roughly 9:45am. I took my time on my essay to write clearly and coherently and left shortly after.

I received my letter of admission into UCSD's program very shortly after my interview. My interview day was the last one and a week after they had already been choosing students for their program; shortly thereafter I found out I had been chosen and was excited that I could be going to their wonderful program.

UCSF

The UCSF application was a multiple part application that probably took me the longest to complete which is partly due to the fact that UCSF and UCSD are not rolling so it didn't matter when I turned in my application. Therefore I took my time. There were 3 parts (short, about the length of a long paragraph) of the application that were required.

The 4th portion was a "If there is anything you'd like to tell us" section. If you have discrepancies in your grades or other things that require explaining, this is the part to do it. In addition the rest of the application questions are, "if this applies to you, then answer the following questions". One word of advice here is to not force it, that is, if you have nothing to say and you don't really apply to those special circumstances, DON'T WRITE ANYTHING! The admissions committee can tell you're just writing fluff to add more to your application.

Write with passion and with your heart, if you do, the admissions committee will see and feel it. They will not doubt your motivation and commitment to be a pharmacist.

This was the most nerve-racking interview probably because I already had high expectations of the school and its program due to prior UCSF info sessions, speaking to alumni and faculty at those sessions, and having friends who currently attend UCSF that I admire. I received the letter for an interview mid-December and as stated before it was the same week as my UCSD interview. After my midterm on Tuesday, I started to prepare for my interview in the usual manner. Although I felt confident at the UCSD interview because I had already done the USC one, the UCSF one was different- I can't explain why. In addition, UCSF has an extensive website so I made sure to go through it, know the website!!! Know the pathways because there is a great chance you might be asked which of the three pharmacy pathways you are interested in and why not the others. I was asked this in my interview.

I didn't want to be tired driving up so I decided to fly up the night before and stay at a friend's place. Luckily, UCSF doesn't start their interviews super early like many other pharmacy schools (my UCSF interview time was 11am), so I had some time to sleep in after my evening flight.

INTERVIEW DAY: The structure of the interview day itself might have slightly changed since Sarah and Wendy's year but the actual interview and essay requirements itself are the same.

When I arrived at UCSF's 500 Parnassus (located in the inner sunset district) lobby, I checked in and was given a folder of information and a name tag. My year, UCSF was interviewing 100 more students than the previous year for the same amount of seats. Each student was put into one of three groups as designated by a colored dot on your nametag.

Depending on the color of your dot, the order of the following three one hour sessions would be determined:

- Current P1 student chat room
- Essay
- Interview

So my order ended up being Essay, Chat Room, Interview. This was a bit frustrating because I was ready to go first for the interview, but someone has to go last, you just have to roll with the punches. My interviewers were a current P3 student and a UCSF Med Center Faculty. The questions they asked me really focused on my application and what I wrote, but others whom I spoke to afterwards said they were asked more about the pathways or about pharmacy topics in general. So it really is up in the air as to what questions you get. A few of my questions were:

- How are your study habits?
- Can you elaborate on pre-pharmacy society?
- You mentioned clinical pharmacy in your application, why do you want to be in this field?

Just don't panic, remember that they don't expect you to know everything.

After everyone was done with all three parts, we were escorted upstairs for a financial aid session which I thought was really helpful because it was FAFSA season so we really needed to get any important info asap. Afterwards there were optional campus tours, otherwise you were free to go. Overall, I loved the city and though the interview was a bit intimidating, I enjoyed my time in SF those past few days.

I received my acceptance letter to UCSF roughly about the end of the month. Although, I don't quite remember the exact date.

After I received all the letters from the schools I applied to, I had a lot of thinking to do. There were many factors I had to take into consideration being the type of program, the type of career I want, family, cost, and location. USC, UCSD, and UCSF each had positive aspects that made me want to attend their program. You will have your own reasons when the time comes around; remember at each interview, you're interviewing the school as well because eventually it'll be your new home for the next 3-4 years of your life. With that being said, good luck and I wish you the best!

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