



Guidelines for the Interview

The interview is the crucial determining factor for the reaching next level of the application process, whether a candidate is endorsed for the internal application or selected as final award recipient for the regional/national application. Reaching the interview stage is an accomplishment in and of itself, as it indicates that your application was compelling enough for the committee to want to learn more about you in person. However, to receive the fellowship award you will need to learn how to master the interview process by showing the committee:

- How well you analyze and respond to questions (how well you “think on your feet”)
- How clearly you are able to communicate your ideas and opinions
- How your person reflects your application package

Interview Structure

Interviews will differ from one fellowship to another, but generally last for 20-30 minutes and include:

- An introductory question to settle the candidate and interview panel
- Questions about the candidate
- Questions relevant to the candidate’s field of study
- Questions related to current events/general knowledge
- A final question to close the interview

On your path to a fellowship, you will encounter at least two rounds of interviews:

Campus-level interview (with a committee of UHM faculty from various academic backgrounds)

- Purpose is to assess competitiveness for national application
- Generally completed in one interview session
- Applicant receives feedback to improve application following interview

Regional/National interview (with a committee comprised of representatives of the sponsoring fellowship agency, alumni, and/or accomplished professionals, such as doctors and lawyers)

- Purpose is to determine final selection of fellowship recipients
- May require multiple rounds of interviews before final awardees are chosen
- UHM Finalists will undergo mock interviews arranged by the UHM Scholarships & Fellowships Office in preparation for actual later-stage interviews

Preparation for the Interview Questions

Although the interview is the first time you and the committee formally meet, they already have a sense of who you are from your application package. Thus, to present yourself in the best light possible during the interview, you should:

- **Know yourself.** Familiarize yourself with your application materials. Be ready to expand on parts of your personal statement or program of study, explain an out-of-place grade on your transcript, or elaborate on a point made in one of your letters of recommendation. Have a clear sense of your unique qualities, what the fellowship has to offer you, and what you can bring to the fellowship.
- **Be yourself.** Be genuine and answer in your own voice rather than guessing what the committee wants to hear. Remember, the point of the interview is for the committee to get to know *you*. Be sincere: if you honestly do not know how to respond to a question, the committee would much rather that you say that you don’t know than listen to an attempt to bluff.
- **Know what is going on in the world around you.** Follow national and world news events by reading journals such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Economist*. Also, stay current within your field of study.
- **Know what you are getting yourself into.** Know your benefactor, the program you are choosing to study, and the area you will be in for your fellowship. Show your ability to be an informed ambassador. Demonstrate that you take the fellowship opportunity seriously and have done your own preparation and research.
- **Develop responses to a number of likely questions.** Have examples ready that could be used for several types of questions. Make sure you use concrete evidence rather than flattering yourself with a list of adjectives. It is also important to make connections between personal experiences, your goals/what you plan to study, and broader national and global issues.

- **Prepare opening and closing remarks.** The introductory or final question in the interview is usually a general one such as “Tell us about yourself” or “Do you have anything else to add?”. This gives you an opportunity to share compelling information that has not been brought up in the other questions. Take advantage of this by preparing remarks that are polished and engaging, but not overly formal or casual.
- **Show your ability to think critically and engage in a discussion.** The interview can be intimidating with a fast-paced series of questions; it may appear as if the panel is trying to attack you or be especially difficult. However, you should keep in mind that the panel is observing how you analyze information and communicate your ideas under pressure. Listen to the questions carefully and make sure you address all parts of it in your response. It is perfectly acceptable to pause, organize your thoughts, then answer the question(s). Avoid using the words “never” or “always” in your responses and try not to appear defensive or aggressive. Remember, the panel might play devil’s advocate to analyze your thought process; treat the interview as a discussion with the panel members, rather than an interrogation by them.
- **Thank the committee at the close of the interview.** Be polite and considerate, leave them with a positive last impression.
- **Practice, practice, practice!** Set up mock sessions with different groups to grill you on your application, general interests, and current events. Not only will you get questions from multiple perspectives, you will also learn how to effectively communicate your ideas to diverse groups of individuals.

Sample Interview Questions

There is no set list of questions panels will use, but questions asked at past fellowship finalist interviews include:

- What would you do if the President made you Surgeon General?
- What is public policy and what distinguishes it from applied economics or politics?
- If we equalize education funding as you propose in your personal statement, won’t students just go to private schools because we’ve decreased the quality of schools in wealthy areas?
- If you had to implement an energy solution today using current technology, what energy solution would you choose and why?
- What is the value of astrophysics to the Air Force and even more importantly the world?
- What should be done with the Cuban embargo? (Student’s response: Remove the embargo) How would you defend this position to Cuban Americans who may be against your position?
- What is your favorite movie? (Student’s response: *Silver Linings Playbook*) Doesn’t the movie’s glossing over the actuality of depression run counter to your ideals as a physician?
- Why should the British taxpayer pay for the Marshall Scholarship?
- What do you do in your free time?
- What was it like being homeschooled?
- What impact do you want to have on the world?

While the following questions are not likely to be the exact ones you will be asked, it would benefit you to incorporate your responses to these (with specific examples!) during your interview:

- What would you like to share about yourself?
- What are your strengths?
- How have you overcome adversity?
- In what instances have you demonstrated leadership?
- How do your goals/interests tie to the bigger picture (for the fellowship, larger society)?
- What do you see yourself doing in 5-10 years?

Other Preparation for the Interview

What you do not say is equally as important as what you do say to the interview committee. You show them who you are by your dress, body language, and mannerisms. Ensure a good impression by:

- Being positive - it will be conveyed through your body language and speech
- Relaxing – remember to breath throughout the interview, it may also help calm nerves
- Showing up early to your interview – give yourself time to settle and prepare
- Maintaining your posture – sit up straight and don’t fold arms or legs
- Giving firm handshakes – also be aware that your nails aren’t sharp or that your hands aren’t sweaty or too cold
- Making eye contact with panel members – avoid staring, but maintain confident and friendly visual contact
- Being aware of nervous habits – fumbling, shaking your leg, mumbling, etc. will distract the panel from what you have to say
- Smiling
- Conveying a professional demeanor – be warm and confident, not arrogant

How to Dress for the Interview

You want to look smart, professional, and well-groomed for the interview. Let the committee focus on what you have to say, not what you are wearing. If you are unsure of what attire is appropriate, err on the side of formal and conservative dress. Use your accomplishments and ideas to make you stand out, not your wardrobe!

- Wear neutral tones like navy or charcoal, rather than colors like orange, red, or pink.
- Go subtle with the accessories – avoid heavy make up, dangling jewelry, very high heels, or heavy cologne/aftershave/perfume. You may want to incorporate one carefully selected colored accessory/piece as a visual way to stand out. You don't want to completely blend into the woodwork, so to speak - one detail with mainly neutrals might be effective, especially if it helps you feel more confident.
- Avoid overly-revealing clothing – on top or for your legs.
- Look neat – avoid messy hair or stains/wrinkles on your clothing.
- Avoid casual wear – no t-shirts, sportswear, jeans, shorts, slippers, etc.
- At the campus level, business casual/aloa attire is appropriate.
Men – aloha shirt, collared shirt, pants/slacks
Women – nice mid-length dress (not sundress), nice mid-length skirt and blouse
- At the regional/national level, wear more formal attire.
Men – suit and tie
Women – nice mid-length dress (not sundress), nice mid-length skirt and blouse, suit

Skype Interviews

While most fellowship interviews will follow a traditional in-person panel arrangement, there may be some instances where the interview is conducted via another medium, such as Skype. For the Luce Scholars Program, the first round of interviews by the fellowship agency is conducted in this manner. For this type of interview, you not only have to be cognizant of your words and mannerisms, but of your environment as well. Follow these tips to help create a favorable impression with the fellowship committee:

- Choose your location carefully. Select a private, quiet area. If needed, place a “Do not disturb” sign outside the door.
- Sit at a desk/table rather than an armchair or bed. You'll have better posture and appear more professional.
- Make sure your background is not distracting – check your surroundings, including posters, lamps, messiness.
- Dress to impress! Wear professional business attire as noted above.
- Sign on earlier than the scheduled interview time.
- Focus the webcam on your face and shoulders.
- Turn off other programs that are running on your computer that may interfere with the call (eg. email pop ups).
- Have a friend test call you prior to the interview to ensure that the program is working correctly and all possible distractions in the room are clear from view.
- Exchange phone numbers/email addresses so that you can contact the committee in case of technical problems.
- Look into the camera so it appears as if you are looking directly at the committee members.
- Speak clearly into the microphone and avoid speaking at same time as other people.
- Don't forget to smile!

This is the last hurdle before decisions on fellowship endorsements or recipients are made. Make the interview count!

The Scholarships & Fellowships Office is an available resource for students applying for fellowships. Please feel free to contact Fellowship Advisor, Sylvia Wu, at ugfellow@hawaii.edu or (808) 956-8391.