

Briefing on the Rhodes and Marshall Scholarships

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Note—personal opinions and reflections are between dashed lines.

Oxford

- Made up of independent colleges (residence).
- Faculties (“departments”) such as music, archaeology (teaching).
- Emphasis on individual instruction.
- “Taught” Masters vs. thesis degrees.
- and a single cumulative exam on subject or thesis (no “courses” with individual exams).

The Rhodes Scholarships (see www.rhodesscholar.org)

- Tenable only at Oxford.
- Established in Cecil Rhodes’ will, 1902.
- 14 countries with ties to Britain.
- Full ride for 2 years (1 more year possible for D.Phil.).
- Most applicants now seek Masters level degree (taught or not) or D.Phil.

Qualities Sought

- Academic distinction and promise: *absolutely necessary* but not sufficient.
 - o 3.8 or above.
 - o Excellent preparation in proposed area of study.
- Ability and inclination to “fight the World’s fight” —service that is sustained, meaningful and integrated with academic life.
- “Not mere bookworms”—evidence of vigor, outward looking.
- Sports? As evidence of vigor.

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- Need and desire for Oxford and a specific program
 - A “hook” helps.
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Identifying and Preparing Students

- Start early (junior year); advertise the advantages of post-grad study abroad.
- Help them learn about Oxford and its faculties.
- Critique student plans and essays, but do no more.

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- Mock interviews may help.
 - Start early; students cannot start in the fall semester and produce a good application.
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Letters of Recommendation

- Institutional letter especially important.
- Other letters should reflect student’s academic breadth and excellence...
- ...but should be from people who know student well.
- Need to be fuller (and franker) than letters to grad schools.

- Comparisons with other able students help.
- Letters from high school teachers, Girl Scout leaders and local politicians are not useful unless truly informed, detailed, and passionate.

The Process

- On campus election (in some cases)
- Student submits application, essay, transcript and list of activities.
 - o to *either* District in which she/he was a legal resident in April *or* District in which she/he went to college.
 - o Deadline: *very* early Oct. (Oct. 1 last year)
- Student arranges for Institutional Letter and 5-8 other letters.
 - o Due early Oct.
- Material read by Selection Committee (see below).
- 10-12 applicants called for interviews in each District (invitations go out very late Oct.).
 - o Interviews are in mid-Nov.
- Each District may award up to two scholarships.
 - o The announcement is made immediately.

Selection Committees

- 7-8 members.
- Balance in age, academic/professional field, gender...sought.
- Most are Rhodes Scholars
 - o but Chairperson never is.
- In my experience, diligent and scrupulously fair.

The (Dreaded) Interview Process

- Schedule/format
 - o Applicants meet the Selection Committee socially on Friday evening.
 - o 20-30 min. first interviews on Saturday.
 - o Some applicants may be called back for second interview.
 - o Committee deliberates, then announces its choices to all applicants.
 - o Selected students are briefed on what to do next.
- *Goals* of the interview
 - o *Not* to intimidate or pressure.
 - o Foremost to learn as much as we can in 20-30 min.
 - o Especially to fill in gaps in written record

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- Some patterns
 - o Start with a soft-ball question (generally by Committee member with background closest to student's).
 - o Interrupt if applicant takes too long.
 - o Alternatively, press for more details.
 - o Committees may ask general ethical/political questions. ("Is an attack on Iran justified?" or "Should federal funds be used for stem cell research?")
 - o For these and other ethical/political questions there are no required "right" answers.
 - o Applicants may be given chance to make final statement.

- Some advice for students
 - Keep answers short and focused.
 - Pause to think is better than “um.”
 - Talk to/with all members of the Committee.
 - Be prepared for chance to make final statement.
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Some Numbers

- About 1000 apply
- in 16 Districts
 - Each district contains one or more states.
 - E.g., District 3 = NY; District 4 = PA, DE and WVA.
- From ~60 applicants, 10-12 selected for interview in each District.
- Up to two of these become Rhodes Scholars for a (usual) total of 32 per year.

The Marshall Scholarships (useful website www.marshallscholarship.org/)

- Tenable at any UK university.
- Established in 1953 to thank US for Marshall Plan aid.
- Full ride for 2 years.
- Students *must* obtain a degree in UK.
- Second bachelors degrees *not* eligible.

Qualities Sought

- Academic distinction and promise: *absolutely necessary* but not sufficient.
 - 3.8 or above.
 - Excellent preparation in proposed area of study.
 - “Not mere bookworms”—evidence of vigor, outward looking.
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- Becoming more like Rhodes.
 - Need and desire for UK university and a specific program there.
 - A “hook” helps.
 - Oxford oversubscribed—consider other UK universities if appropriate.
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Identifying and Preparing Students

- Start early (junior year); advertise the advantages of post-grad study abroad.
 - Help them learn about UK and its universities.
 - Specific knowledge of people, programs and universities helps.
 - Critique student plans and essays, but do no more.
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- Mock interviews may help.
 - Start early; students cannot start in the fall semester and produce a good application.
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Letters of Recommendation

- Letters should reflect student's academic breadth and excellence...
- ...but should be from people who know student well.
- Comparisons with other able students help.

The Process

- On campus selection (in some cases)
- Student submits application, essay and transcript
 - o to one of 8 regional centers—one in which he/she lives or is studying
 - o Deadline very early. (Oct. 4 last year)
- Student arranges for letters of recommendation.
- Institution must endorse.
- Material read by Selection Committee.
- 10-20 (??) applicants called for an interview.
 - o Unlike Rhodes, travel is reimbursed.
 - o No second interviews.
- 40 chosen.

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- Release of names of winners has been slow in past because of need to place students.
 - o Not "instantaneous" as for Rhodes.
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Selection Committees

- 7-8 members.
- Balance in age, academic/professional field, gender...sought.
- Most are academics, professionals or embassy or consular staff.

Interviews

- Each applicant has one 20-30 min. interview (no second interviews).
- *Goals* of the interview
 - o *Not* to intimidate or pressure.
 - o Foremost to learn as much as we can in 20-30 min.
 - o especially to fill in gaps in written record.

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- Some patterns—see earlier personal comments.
 - Some advice for students—see earlier personal comments.