

# **Putting your best foot forward: preparing yourself for graduate school interviews**

Sharon L. Milgram  
milgrams@od.nih.gov

# **What do YOU need to accomplish during the interview?**

- **Present yourself effectively and honestly**
- **Show that you understand the field you are entering**
- **Clearly present your current interests in the field knowing they will evolve**
- **Explain any bumps in your past without making excuses**
- **Figure out if this is the “right” school and life for you**
- **Find out if the research being done excites you**

**During the application process  
you may communicate with:**



**The Director of Graduate Studies**

**Program administrators**

**Specific faculty in the program**

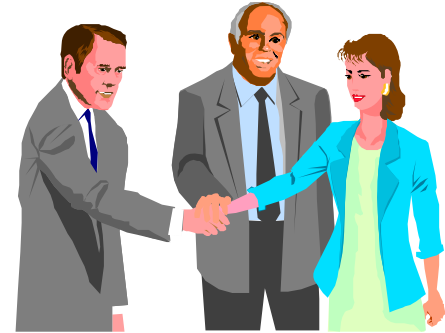
# Setting up the interview

- **Respond to calls or e-mails promptly**
- **Read instructions carefully before calling with logistical questions**
- **Follow directions for planning your visit**
- **Try to go during the 'interview weekend' if that is the format used**
- **Provide a list of faculty you want to meet with**

# **Preparing for the interview**

- **Reread material about the school and program**
- **Reread your application**
- **Ask for a list of faculty you will meet with; read about their work**
- **Practice common interview questions**
- **Prepare questions in advance**
- **Practice with a mentor**

# Interview etiquette



- **Dress neatly but comfortably**
- **Bring some casual clothes for social events**
- **Shake hands and make eye contact when meeting applicants and hosts**
- **Attend social events; make an effort to get to know current students and potential classmates**
- **Ask questions, be enthusiastic and engaged throughout the visit**
- **Don't treat the interview as a free trip**

**REMEMBER....**

**The program is  
interviewing you..**

**AND**

**You are interviewing the  
program**

# Questions you might be asked...

- Tell me about your previous research experience
- What do you enjoy most about doing research?
- What do you find frustrating about doing research?
- What type of research do you hope to work on?
- What interested you in our program?
- Why did you do so poorly in \_\_\_\_\_?
- Why do you want to be a scientist?
- What are your long-term goals?
- What are your strengths? What areas do you need to strengthen?
- How do you deal with people who are different from you?
- What do you think will be hard about grad school?
- Anything I didn't ask about that you want me to know?
- Do you have any questions for me?

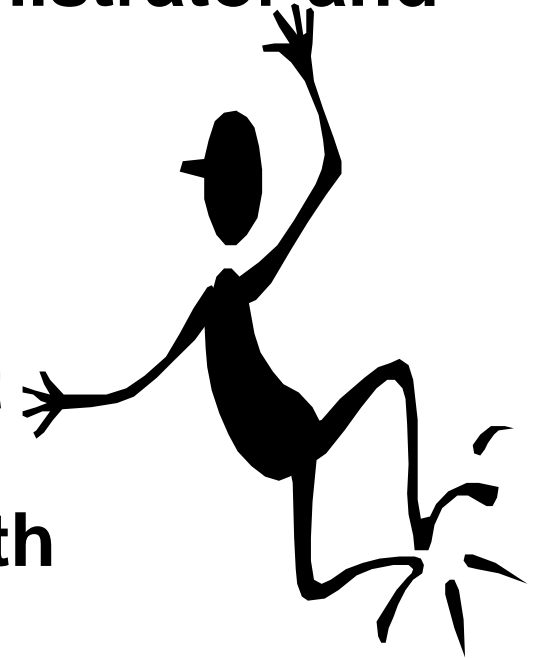


# Questions you might want to ask

- **What types of positions do students who graduate from this program typically take?**
- **How many mentors can I choose from?**
- **What journals do students publish in?**
- **Do students attend meetings; who pays?**
- **What is the average time for degree?**
- **Do many students drop out of the program?**
- **Are there teaching requirements? Teaching courses?**
- **Do many students have their own grants? Do they get help writing and submitting grants?**
- **Do current students feel supported?**
- **Is the campus welcoming and diverse?**

# After the interview.....

- **Thank the DGS, the program administrator and student host by e-mail**
- **Acknowledge offers with a prompt thank-you, and find out when the program needs a firm commitment**
- **Do not hesitate to e-mail or call with any questions you might have**
- **Do NOT commit before you are ready to; backing-out is terrible and the scientific community is relatively small**



# Final thoughts

- **Minimize stress and distraction during your trip**
- **Be self-confident but not egotistical**
- **Be professional at all time. You are being ‘interviewed’ even when you are not in formal interviews**
- **It is a kiss of death to be asked “Do you have any questions?” and not have any**
- **Don’t be overly swayed by the opinion of any one person you meet**
- **Talk with the program director if anyone asks inappropriate questions or if an interview goes poorly**
- **Take some notes on the way home - your memory will fade**