

**Volunteer Alumni Interviewers  
Training Manual, 2018-2019**

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## **Selection Process of Schreyer Scholars**

The current selection process for Schreyer Scholars focuses on two independent parts: 1) the transcript review, and 2) the holistic review. The transcript review is completed by Schreyer staff, as it often relies on comparative information from the school's other transcripts (sometimes over a period of several years) and can require follow-up with high school counselors. The transcripts are rated on a one-to-five scale:

- 5 Truly exceptional accomplishment even by the high standards of the SHC applicant pool; someone who would be recognized as an academic star by any college or university.
- 4 The higher side of what we can reasonably expect in our eventual class of 300 Scholars—someone who's done everything that a top student typically does at the high school, but nothing to mark that student as exceptional within that top group.
- 3 The lower side of what we can reasonably expect in our eventual class of 300 Scholars—a very solid record but some margin for better courses and/or grades within the context of the high school; or a top student at a school with very limited enrichment opportunities.
- 2 Too close to a standard-good Penn State applicant's transcript to have a strong academic claim on being a Schreyer Scholar, but someone we might be willing to consider if the holistic review assesses them to be exceptional.
- 1 An applicant who might be standard-good University Park material, or occasionally even worse than that, but not someone we could consider for the SHC except in very exceptional circumstances—and only for majors that don't rely on conventional academic assessment, e.g. Music.

All complete applications are given a full, holistic review by the Faculty Selection Committee (see below), even those applications whose transcript ratings make them unlikely-to-impossible to admit. The transcript rating is one of three elements of the rubric behind most SHC admission decisions, the others being the two FSC readers' ratings.

The holistic review for each application is conducted by two randomly selected members of the Faculty Selection Committee, which is composed of SHC-involved faculty (and the occasional staff adviser) from across the University. While reviewers have access to the transcript, they do not have access to the in-house transcript assessment and we encourage reviewers to reference the transcript only as part of their

holistic review, or only to understand the context for the student's interests and extracurricular involvements.

Reviewers do not assess each part of the application (essays, short answers, teacher and counselor recommendations, activity listings) separately, but rather take the application as a whole in order to assess various applicant qualities such as intellectual ability and leadership. Reviewers award each applicant a summary rating (also on a 1 to 5 scale, as for transcripts, but with different definitions), and the SHC mandates a somewhat linear distribution of ratings over the entire scale to improve the reliability and usefulness of ratings.

The two reviewer ratings and the transcript rating are run through a rubric, which translates these inputs into one of four outcomes: **accept, reject, bubble, or disparity**. The first two outcomes correspond to uniformly high or uniformly low inputs, e.g. 5-5-5 and similarly high combinations are accepted, while 1-1-1 and similarly low combinations are rejected. Bubble cases are those in which one or more inputs are towards the middle, and since we don't know precisely how many offers we will be in a position to make, nor do we know in advance what the distribution of transcript ratings will be (or FSC ratings, within the flexibility we permit), we are conservative in pre-programming accept and reject combinations. In other words, the bubble territory is fairly wide and that makes the interview process potentially very relevant. Disparity is the initial outcome for applications that (a) have meaningfully divergent FSC ratings, or (b) have significant differences between the FSC and transcript ratings. In both cases, SHC staff review the application and resolve the outcome into one of the other three categories.

## **Evaluating the Interview: How we use the interview results**

Even for well-established interview processes at other institutions, interview assessments are usually not determinative of outcomes: as one admissions office told us, an interview generally “won’t sink a star, or raise the dead.” Interview results are often like teacher recommendations, which generally support the assessment made of the transcript and the rest of the application, but sometimes provide useful insights in either direction.

Interview results have been used to resolve applications to the SHC, both positively and negatively. In the past, when interview results were not available, we often had to ask a third faculty reader to help resolve the decision, so the addition of the interview provides significant insight into the applicant we did not have before, as well as a more efficient decision-making process.

**It is important to keep in mind that the interview results are *only one element of the application review*.** The academic background and full application assessment will continue to weigh heavily in the final decision.

## **Purpose of the Interview**

While the selection process for Schreyer Scholars is very thorough, the missing piece, prior to the addition of the admissions interview program, was the assessment of an applicant's interpersonal skills. Intelligence and talent are important but are strengthened even further by the ability to communicate effectively. The interview helps evaluate how the candidates present themselves, articulate their ideas, and engage in conversation. All of these skills are required of Schreyer Scholars in the classroom and in co- and extra-curricular activities and as they prepare for their life after Penn State.

The interview also provides an ideal opportunity for the alumni interviewers to promote Penn State and the Schreyer Honors College. Applicants to the SHC are likely considering other top universities in the country. The conversation that takes place during the interview invites the interviewer to share their passion for Penn State, provide insight into their personal experiences and the power of the Penn State and Schreyer Honors College network.

Finally, an admissions interview program provides an excellent opportunity to engage alumni, who can provide insight into the experience of being a Scholar at Penn State. Alumni enjoy providing a meaningful service to the college, and participating in the selection of future Schreyer Scholars from an increasingly competitive applicant pool.

## The Interview

Experience has shown us that 45-minutes is ample time for each interview: 20-25 - minutes for the actual interview, 5-10 minutes for the applicant to ask questions, and 15-minutes for the evaluation. The actual interview should be more of a conversation, and not a stressful encounter. Included are some recommended questions to ask each applicant for the purpose of getting to know the applicant and give them an opportunity to demonstrate their communication skills.

Specific interview days will be hosted in Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Princeton, and University Park. Multiple interviews will occur simultaneously at a central location to permit efficient completion of the interviews.

Alumni conducting interviews in other locations will be able to schedule interviews at their convenience during the permitted window.

### Background Information about the Applicant

In preparation for each interview, a copy of the applicant's biographic information and responses to the short-answer essay questions from the admissions application will be made available to interviewers. *Please make sure to read these materials in advance of the interview.* The short answer questions interviewers will see include:

- *Please list any college courses which you have taken for credit (NOT including AP or other college-in-high-school courses)*
- *Please tell us about a book that's influenced you, from any point in your life*
- *Please list the most important scholastic distinctions or honors you have received, including any special programs in which you have participated, such as international study, summer enrichment programs, internships, or research experiences.*
- *Please give us some information about your principal extracurricular, community, and family activities, work experiences, voluntary service, and hobbies, in the order of their interest to you. For each, be sure to include any major accomplishment such as leadership positions, varsity letters, awards, etc.*
- *Please write a brief paragraph about your most significant activity out of those listed above, and its importance to you.*

Interviewers will not have access to the applicant's academic transcript, long essay responses, or letters of recommendation. Interviewers may certainly let the applicants know what they do and do not have access to their admissions applications.

## Suggested Interview Questions

Because each interview should be more of a conversation, and may be different based on the applicant, we have listed a sampling of interview questions.

1. What initially attracted you to apply to Penn State and the Schreyer Honors College?
2. What are you looking for in a college experience?
3. What are you interested in studying in college and why?
4. What would you expect from a college honors class?
5. What kind of activities are you interested in pursuing in college?
6. What do you see yourself doing after college?
7. Where do you see yourself after your first year in college? In the next 5 years? In the next 10 years?
8. Who, or what, is your source of motivation/inspiration?
9. Who has been a good role model for you?
10. Give me your best example of when you demonstrated the characteristics of a good leader.
11. What has been your favorite high school class? Why?
12. What accomplishment are you most proud of, to date?
13. What has been the biggest challenge you've had to overcome?
14. What goal or objective were you unable to achieve in high school? What did you learn from this experience?
15. If I had the opportunity to talk to your closest friend, how would he/she describe you?
16. Have you had a defining moment/experience in your life that has had significant impact on the person you are today?
17. Is there anything we have not talked about that is not in your application that you'd like to address before we finish?

## **Applicant Questions**

Interviewers should leave at least 5-10 minutes at the end of each interview to permit the applicant to ask any questions they may have. Interviewers may respond to the questions to the best of their ability. However, alumni should not feel compelled to be “experts” in all areas of Penn State and the Schreyer Honors College. In the case where an answer is not known, please refer the question to a member of the SHC staff who will follow up directly with the applicant.

Applicant questions for the interviewer are more likely to solicit opinion and insight into the interviewer’s experience at Penn State. Interviewers should feel comfortable to share experiences and provide examples that will help the applicant learn more about the PSU and SHC experience. Remember that one of the primary purposes of the interview is to promote the university and the honors college, so please use this opportunity to do so!

## **Technical Requirements**

All relevant information on the applicant will be provided through a web interface designed by the SHC staff. The evaluation all interviewers will be asked to complete at the conclusion of each interview is also available on this same web site. Therefore, interviewers will be asked to bring their own electronic device (PC, laptop, tablet, etc) that will permit access to the internet.

Interviewers will be able to review the information about each applicant prior to the actual interview. At the conclusion of the interview, interviewers should complete the on line evaluation before moving on to the next interview, whenever possible.

## Interviewer Evaluation Form

### Interpersonal Skills (non-verbal)

#### 1. Attitude and disposition during interview

1	2	3	4	5
Nervous, poor eye contact		Some eye contact, displayed some uncomfortable habits		Good eye contact, poised and relaxed

Comments to support your ratings:

#### 2. Enthusiasm/energy

1	2	3	4	5
Displayed no energy in responses; apathetic		Some evidence of enthusiasm and excitement		Enthusiastic and passionate; engaging personality

Comments to support your ratings:

### Communication Skills

#### 1. Verbal Skills

1	2	3	4	5
Spoke too quickly/softly hesitated in responses; distracting speech (use of "like", "um", "you know")		Inconsistent speaking skills and clarity		Spoke clearly and with confidence; concise and articulate

Comments to support your ratings:

*2. Clarity and depth of responses*

1	2	3	4	5
Gave no examples; shallow; asked no questions		Some explanation and good examples; asked some questions		Asked good questions; thorough and evidence of depth

Comments to support your ratings:

**Motivation**

*1. Motivation and drive*

1	2	3	4	5
Source of motivation unclear; Primarily motivated by external sources		Mixed motivation: some internal/external drive		Self-motivated; Strong internal sources of motivation

Comments to support your ratings:

**Summary Ranking, Observations and Comments**

**Overall Ranking**

1	2	3	4	5
<b>Not a good candidate candidate</b>		<b>Average</b>		<b>Excellent</b>

## **Interview Summary**

### **Purpose of the Interview**

Interviews of potential Schreyer Scholars have three central goals:

1. To assess applicant interpersonal and communication skills;
2. To promote the SHC and Penn State University; and
3. To actively engage alumni with the SHC and Penn State.

### **The Interview**

45-minutes will be allotted for each interview:

- 30-minutes of interview time (20-25 minutes for interview questions and 5-10 minute for applicant questions) and 15-minutes for the evaluation.
- The actual interview should be more of a conversation, not a stressful encounter.
- See the recommended questions. This is not an exhaustive list, just some suggestions for the purpose of getting to know the applicant and giving them an opportunity to demonstrate their communication skills.
- A copy of the applicant's responses to the short-answer essay questions in the admissions application will be made available.
- Interviewers will not have access to the applicant's academic transcript, long essay responses, or letters of recommendation.
- You are welcome to share your business card or personal contact information at the conclusion of the interview if you'd like; this is not a requirement, simply left to your good judgment.

## **Expectations of Interviewers**

As a result of the interview program implementation the past few years, we have compiled a list of advice for interviewers:

### **DO...**

- be sure to introduce yourself, so the applicant is able to better understand who you are and your background with Penn State and the Schreyer Honors College.
- maintain an informal tone and remain educational in spirit, rather than evaluative.
- be aware of how your language, tone, and other nonverbal cues may be interpreted by anxious high school students.
- treat each student with respect, patience, and kindness.
- ask more open-ended questions, rather than ones with a single 'right' answer.
- be conscious of the limits of your knowledge about Penn State and the Schreyer Honors College. Remember that it is absolutely fine to refer applicants to contact the Schreyer Honors College admissions office with any questions.

### **DO NOT...**

- treat the admissions interview exactly like a job interview! Remember that we are not looking for a single, perfect, fully-formed applicant, but a group of applicants who will grow to enrich the Schreyer Honors College overall.
- make any promises or predictions regarding the student's admission to the Schreyer Honors College or Penn State.
- ask about or compare Penn State and the Schreyer Honors College to other postsecondary institutions the applicant is considering.
- feel obliged to ask every applicant the very same questions in the same order. Overall, though, your questions should have a similar degree of challenge.
- rely on your first impression of the applicant, good or bad. Students are told to dress casually for the interview so please do not judge the applicant based on their appearance
- place too much weight on one particularly excellent or foolish answer.
- ask about application elements that were not provided to you by the Schreyer Honors College (i.e. high schools grades, test scores).
- ask about personal questions about the applicant's identities.

## Website for Interviewers

### Website Outline

Interviewers will commit to either SHC-hosted, independent, or videochat interviews at their choice of date, time, and location (or, in the case of videochat interviews, mediums). These interview appointments will be available to applicants in early December, after all interviewers have posted their available dates and times. Please post the number of interviews you would like to complete, as every time slot is likely to be taken. Interviewers should complete at **least three interviews in total**. An automated email will be sent to interviewers when an applicant chooses an appointment. All interviewers will be able to see the information of students assigned to you through the interview website.

For those interviewing on a SHC-hosted interview day (Boston, Philadelphia, Princeton, and University Park), date, time and location will be pre-filled and interviewers can choose to occupy these appointments. For those interviewing elsewhere, in an “independent region,” the interviewer will input the date, time and location of his/her choice (for example, an interviewer would input: Saturday, November 10<sup>th</sup>, 10 am, Starbucks, 2030 N. Atherton St. - State College, PA 16803). For videochat interviews, interviewers input a time, time zone, and select specific videochat mediums (i.e. FaceTime, Google Hangout, Skype). When a student books an interview, the alumni interviewer is notified via email and can log in to see the student information corresponding to the appoint he/she has booked. By clicking on the evaluation button, interviewers will be taken to the applicant’s information and short answer questions to review prior to the interview. Please see page 19 for additional details about best practices for interviewing elsewhere.

### Application Information

Each applicant’s information is divided into three tabs:

1. General Tab – includes applicant’s high school, PSU college and major as listed on their admissions application
2. Application Tab – lists the short-answer essay questions and answers from the SHC application. These questions will tell you more about the applicant’s interests, activities and leadership
3. Evaluation Tab – provides the evaluation to complete at the end of each interview. Since you are evaluating the applicant’s interpersonal and communication skills, each question is related specifically to these two areas. You are asked to include comments to support your ratings; include facts and observations from the interview. Please note that you are not being asked to recommend/not recommend an applicant for admission. You are only being

asked to assess their interpersonal skills during your interview. You should save the evaluation form so you can go back and review your comments. **Once the form is submitted, you will not be able to retrieve it.**

4. Essays – Applicant essays are not part of the interview process. However, for your information, this year's essay questions were:
  - a. There are 27 amendments to the Constitution of the United States. What should be the 28th? (Critical thinking)
  - b. Are China and India developing countries? Why or why not? (Global Perspective)
  - c. The Seven Wonders of the World is a well-known list highlighting spectacular natural phenomena or man-made structures. Please describe the Seven Wonders of *your* world: They could include people, places, events, or things that have significantly affected who you are. (Personal Passion)

### **Confidentiality Statement**

The Schreyer Honors College appreciates the time and effort committed by its alumni to conduct admissions interviews. All alumni interviewers will have access to each applicant's admissions information for the purpose of conducting the interview. Please remember to respect the confidentiality of this information. Likewise, interviewer evaluations and interview rankings will not be shared with applicants for any reason.

## Code of Conduct

Volunteers must answer Yes/No to the following questions or statements when signing up for the program.

I am a/an:

- Admissions officer at a post-secondary institution
- College counselor
- Immediate family member of a current college applicant to any institution
- College preparation consultant

If you said yes to any of the above, please contact the alumni relations office at [ScholarAlumni@psu.edu](mailto:ScholarAlumni@psu.edu), or call at (814) 865-4258.

During the admissions interview process, I agree to the following:

- I will strive to create a mutually respectful environment and interaction for all applicants.
- I will treat all information provided by the Schreyer Honors College about the admissions process and the applicants I interview as confidential.
- I will not create any impressions or expectations, positive or negative, about the student's probability of admission.
- I will ensure that interactions occur in a safe, accessible and neutral location; at a time that is agreed upon by both parties; and that respects the volunteer's and the student's commitments to school, work, activities, and family obligations.
- I will avoid any conflict of interest by not interviewing applicants with whom there is an existing personal, familial, or professional connection.
- I will not initiate conversation that may make a candidate uncomfortable or that is overly personal, whether with regard to the candidate or the volunteer. This includes, but is not limited to, using inappropriate language, making disparaging comparisons of secondary or post-secondary institutions, or asking the student what other institutions he or she is applying to.

If you disagree with any of the above, please contact the alumni relations office at [ScholarAlumni@psu.edu](mailto:ScholarAlumni@psu.edu), or call at (814) 865-4258.

## **Admissions Interview Program Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Q. How do you determine which students are interviewed?**

A: All students who apply to the Schreyer Honors College prior to the November 30<sup>th</sup> deadline will be given the opportunity to interview with an alumnus/a. For students living in areas with no alumni volunteers, interviews via videochat will be offered. In situations where no workable solution is available, the student may not be interviewed. This will not impact their admissions decision.

### **Q: What is the difference between SHC-hosted interview days versus independent interviews?**

A: We hold SHC-hosted interviews in our major markets, which include Boston, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Princeton, and University Park. Students from those areas will be able to interview on set weekend dates in December, in addition to available independent interviews. The SHC hosts these interviews in a central location, and alumni and students meet for their interview at that site. For independent interviews, students and alumni will set up mutually convenient times and locations for the interviews.

### **Q: What if I live in an area that does not have SHC-hosted interview days?**

A: Students who do not live in areas invited to SHC-hosted interviews will be able to meet with alumni interviewers for independent in-person interviews, completed at an agreed upon time and place. Students who live in an area where there are no Scholar alumni will be able to schedule a remote interview via videochat.

### **Q: What is the benefit of participating in this program?**

A: As an interviewer, you have the opportunity to promote the Schreyer Honors College and help recruit many bright and talented prospective Schreyer Scholars who participate in the interview program. You will be able to share your first-hand experiences as a student and Scholar at Penn State.

### **Q: When and how will I be trained to interview prospective Scholars?**

A: We offer most of our trainings via online, interactive webinar through Zoom. If training is unavailable, or you are unable to attend, training can be completed by watching a short video and reviewing the training manual. After you are an experienced interviewer, we will only require training every three years. However, we will ask you to watch the short training video and review the manual prior to each interview season.

### **Q: If I participated in this program as an interviewer in the past, do I need to complete the training again?**

A: Yes, with the changes in timelines for 2018, we would recommend reviewing the video and training manual to refresh your memory before you complete your interviews. We ask all of our volunteers to retrain every three years, as techniques and requirements can change.

**Q: When will interviews take place?**

A: Interviews, both group and independent, will begin in October 2018 and conclude by the middle of December 2018.

**Q: How can I get more information about this program?**

A: If you are interested in being an alumni interviewer, or if you would like more information, please contact [ScholarAlumni@psu.edu](mailto:ScholarAlumni@psu.edu). You can review the job description for information on the program's goals, volunteer responsibilities, and services the Schreyer Honors College will provide to you throughout the program.

**Q: If a student completes an interview, will the interview evaluation be used in the admission decision?**

A: Yes, a student's interview evaluation will be used in their admissions decision if they complete an interview.

**Q: If a student does not complete an interview, will the admission decision be negatively affected?**

A: There is no penalty for not participating in the interview component. Students who do not interview will be evaluated solely on the other portions of their application, and will not be negatively affected by not participating in an interview.

**Q: Who will interview a student?**

A: We rely on Scholar alumni volunteers to conduct interviews to help evaluate applicants' interpersonal communication skills. These interviews are beneficial to the applicant, because they are able to hear first-hand about their interviewer's Penn State and University Scholars Program/Schreyer Honors College experiences.

## **Alumni Admissions Interview Program Tips for Independent Interviews**

Thank you for volunteering to serve as an Independent Alumni Interviewer with the Schreyer Honors College!

### **How should I select my interview time, medium, and location\* and connect with my assigned student(s)?**

You will input locations and times for independent interviews you are available to conduct. Interviews should take place in a safe, convenient, and accessible location and at a reasonable time. Examples of appropriate locations include a public office building, public library, or local coffee shop. Each time slot and location will be displayed to applicants, who will choose to an interview convenient to them. Once an applicant chooses your interview slot, you will receive a confirmation email. Please reach out to your assigned student(s) via email to confirm your mutually agreeable location, date, and time to meet. For security purposes, please cc the SHC office when communicating with prospective students (**SHCAAIP@psu.edu**). It is also recommended that you obtain a cell phone number of the student in case you need to make a last minute change to the interview.

While an in-person interview is certainly preferable, we recognize that geography and/or logistics may make an online medium a better option. Available online tools that may be appropriate include Google Hangout, Skype, or FaceTime. Interviewers comfortable with online technologies should add videochat interview slots to their interview appointments. Should a previously scheduled in-person interview not work out for you and an applicant, a videochat interview is a good backup. In 2018, 8% of the interviews conducted were completed on line.

Regardless of the medium you choose (in-person or online) you should adequately prepare for the interview by reading about the applicant's background and short essay answers under the evaluation section of the website. When completing your evaluation of the student(s), we will ask you to identify the type of interview you chose to conduct.

If you are not able to connect with your assigned student(s) after multiple attempts, please contact the Schreyer Honors College at [scholaralumni@psu.edu](mailto:scholaralumni@psu.edu) or 814-865-4258.

### **What should the interview be like?**

Interviews should last for approximately 45 minutes.

Interviews are intended to be a comfortable conversation about the student's activities and achievements as well as their interest in Penn State and the Schreyer Honors College. Remember that the goal of the interview is to gain a more holistic perspective of the student. Feel free to introduce yourself to the student – share a bit about your background with Penn State and the Schreyer Honors College or University Scholars Program.

Do not make any promises or predictions regarding the student's admission to the SHC. If you are unsure of the best way to answer a student's questions, please encourage them to contact the admissions office at the Schreyer Honors College at [scholars@psu.edu](mailto:scholars@psu.edu) or 814-865-2060.

**What should I do after the interview?**

Submit your completed evaluation forms to the SHC in a timely manner.

Please contact the Schreyer Honors College at [scholaralumni@psu.edu](mailto:scholaralumni@psu.edu) or 814-865-4258 with any additional questions.