

Should I Apply?

A Q&A with the American Secretary of the Rhodes Trust

The Rhodes Scholarships were established after the death of Cecil Rhodes, who dreamed of improving the world through the diffusion of leaders motivated to serve their contemporaries, trained in the contemplative life of the mind, and broadened by their acquaintance with one another and by their exposure to cultures different from their own. Mr. Rhodes hoped that his plan of bringing able students from throughout the English-speaking world and beyond to study at Oxford University would aid in the promotion of international understanding and peace. Each year, 32 U. S. citizens are among more than 80 Rhodes Scholars worldwide who take up degree courses at Oxford University. The first American Rhodes Scholars entered Oxford in 1904.

Mr. Rhodes' Will contains four criteria by which prospective Rhodes Scholars are to be selected:

- (1) literary and scholastic attainments;
- (2) energy to use one's talents to the full, as exemplified by fondness for and success in sports;
- (3) truth, courage, devotion to duty, sympathy for and protection of the weak, kindness, unselfishness and fellowship;
- (4) moral force of character and instincts to lead, and to take an interest in one's fellow beings.

The American Secretary of the Rhodes Trust administers all aspects of the Rhodes Scholarships in the United States. On behalf of the Rhodes Trustees in England, he determines the rules and procedures of the competition, advises colleges and universities, selects all selection committee members, interprets Trust policies and selection criteria for Americans, and advises Rhodes Scholars-elect. The current American Secretary is Elliot F. Gerson. The Rhodes Trustees have designated officers in other countries with Rhodes Scholarships who have similar responsibilities.

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The questions on the pages which follow are representative of those commonly asked of this office or of the Secretaries of Committees of Selection. The questions are divided into four sections:

- I. Is Oxford The Right Place For Me To Study?
- II. What Is Life Like At Oxford?
- III. What Does The Application Process Involve?
- IV. What Are My Chances?

* updated annually

I. Is Oxford The Right Place For Me To Study?

Q1. How can I learn more about Oxford and whether it would be right for me?

A. *Study the U. S. Rhodes Scholarship web site (www.rhodesscholar.org), and Oxford's (www.ox.ac.uk) (linked to the Rhodes site). Read the Oxford Graduate and Undergraduate Prospectuses, available on the web. Check whether any of your faculty attended Oxford and make an appointment to meet with them. In some circumstances, particularly in certain areas of graduate research, it is appropriate to write to potential instructors at Oxford to see if the proposed area of study is realistic and can be well pursued at Oxford. Finally, try to contact recent or even current Oxonians if at all possible. Oxford has changed dramatically in recent years, particularly due to the expanding number of graduate degrees. The recollections of alumni, particularly about academic courses, may not reflect Oxford today.*

Q2. What degrees are most popular for U. S. Rhodes Scholars?

A. *In recent years, the various master's degrees have become the most popular for American college graduates at Oxford, although doctorates are now pursued by almost one-half of a typical American Rhodes class. This is a significant change from the experience in all decades through the 80's, when most Americans pursued second B.A. degrees at Oxford. There are several reasons for these shifts. Among the community of current Rhodes Scholars, it is now as common to take two one-year M.Sc. courses as it is to take the M.Phil., especially as there are many more one-year M.Sc.s. being introduced than M.Phil.s. each year. Moreover, these "taught master's degree" options are designed at least in part with the interests of overseas graduates in mind, with a combination of tutorial-like instruction, small classes, lectures and opportunities for some research and writing. At the same time, many of the undergraduate degrees now assume greater preparation than in previous years, made possible by the higher degree of academic specialization in British secondary schools than in the U. S. Finally, graduate education in general—including at the doctorate level—has received steadily greater support and emphasis at Oxford. Nonetheless, various B.A. degrees continue to be the right choice for a few Americans, and Oxford continues to be renowned for the quality of its undergraduate teaching.*

There are more "interdisciplinary" B.A.s today than there were when most U. S. Rhodes Scholars who wanted a "broadening" experience with strong, tutorial-centered teaching had little to choose but Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE). You might consider History and Politics, Economics and Management, Geography (an extremely diverse and vibrant discipline in Britain), History and Economics, History and English, or Human Sciences (a multidisciplinary biological and social science course).

Q3. My college advisor is urging me to apply. I've done extremely well and she feels that I have a good chance. I am interested given the great prestige of the award, but I really don't think I want to study for a degree at Oxford—but it might be fun to live in England, study a little and learn some new things, and travel and participate in some of the clubs and sports at Oxford. Should I apply?

- A. *No. The Rhodes Scholarship is a financial award for academic study. While there are many things to enjoy on the Scholarship, students who do not want to apply themselves academically in an Oxford degree course should not apply. Scholars must enroll in a program leading to a degree, and make satisfactory progress toward that degree to retain the Scholarship. Our committees are experienced in recognizing—and not selecting—“trophy hunters” or “academic tourists” with only modest interest in an Oxford degree. Moreover, those who apply primarily for the honor, or to “live abroad,” may tend to be dismissive of their academic experience. This disserves those who seek spots at the University who would be truly delighted by the prospect.*
- Q4. My advisors at my college say Oxford is not a good place for me to do graduate work in science. Is that correct?
- A. *This is absolutely incorrect. In most sciences, Oxford is among the most distinguished institutions in the world, and most of its science departments receive the highest possible rating as done by the British Research Assessment Exercise. The now very old perception that Oxford’s strengths in the arts is not matched in the sciences is almost certainly no longer correct—if it ever was (Bacon, Boyle, Harvey, Halley, Radcliffe, Sherrington, Hinshelwood, Todd, Florey, Tinbergen, Hodgkin, and many other renowned scientists did their research at Oxford). As in the United States, the strength of the graduate research programs in the sciences at Oxford can’t fairly be generalized, and depends very much on the particular field and subfield and the individuals under whom you might work as a graduate student. As in all doctoral courses in Britain however, the Oxford doctorate tends to include very little work outside one’s dissertation.*
- Oxford is not the best choice for every Scholar, and you should be certain that your work will be supported there. I strongly urge you to explore the extensive material available in Oxford’s web pages in your particular areas of interest and then, perhaps, to correspond with particular faculty in your areas of interest, or you might ask my office or your district secretary if he or she can give you the name of a recent American graduate of the Oxford science course you are considering.*
- In recent years, in fact, a relatively high number of American Rhodes Scholars have read for science degrees, or were undergraduate science majors. Approximately 40% of Oxford students overall are enrolled in science courses.*
- Q5. I’d like to do a D.Phil. in chemistry. What will American universities think of that compared to a U. S. Ph.D.?
- A. *Once again, generalizations are difficult. Chemistry happens to be an extraordinarily distinguished department at Oxford—it is one of the world’s largest—and its D.Phils. are likely to be regarded as among the world’s best. Once again, how one’s doctorate is regarded has much to do with one’s supervision and the quality of one’s individual work. And the breadth of work one is expected to do for a doctorate at Oxford is less than in the United States.*
- Q6. I am interested in an academic career in the U. S. and would like to do a D.Phil. in the social sciences/humanities. How will American universities regard my degree?
- A. *As in the sciences, one cannot safely generalize. Because the Oxford D.Phil. does not involve broad coursework in addition to the thesis, because one usually develops no*

teaching experience while pursuing a D.Phil., and because depending on the field and institution, there may or may not be “credit” for a D.Phil., it is well-advised to consult with American professors in your area of interest before choosing the D.Phil. as opposed to other degree options. But there is no question that it is a highly regarded degree everywhere in the world, and some enormously distinguished faculty members in the United States’ most distinguished universities have Oxford D.Phils. as their final degrees.

Q7. I’ve heard that if you are a graduate student at Oxford you’re entirely on your own and have no classes. That sounds pretty lonely. What’s it like?

A. *It is true that the D.Phil. degree often involves no formal “classroom” work, and is strictly a research degree. But many must precede the D.Phil. with an M.St. or M.Sc. which are both “taught” degrees, one of the many other “taught” graduate degrees, or other coursework with fellow students. Other friendships grow in research groups, in science labs, and through advisors. In any event, there is abundant camaraderie in the college Middle Common Rooms (“MCRs”). (MCRs refer to the room(s) and social organizations in colleges for graduate students, including those reading for second B.A. degrees.) Moreover, perhaps particularly in the sciences, there is extensive social interaction among students, faculty, and research scientists. In many fields there are (sometimes very large) group collaborations, and there are seminars and colloquia, topical summer schools, etc. And many Americans find sports, drama, or musical groups fast ways to establish friendships. All that said, be aware that even B.A. students are usually studying only in small tutorials of only one, two, or three, not the large classes they were used to in the United States. Oxford does require a measure of independence and the ability to carry on separate pursuits.*

Q8. I’ve heard of the tutorial system but don’t know much about it. How does it work?

A. *Candidates “reading” for (i.e., studying or preparing for) B.A. degrees are assigned a tutor (or tutors) for each Term (the academic year is divided into three eight-week terms). A tutor may continue for more than one term, or even for all terms, or you may have different tutors each term. It is the tutor’s responsibility to assure that you are prepared to do well in the examinations you will take at the end of your course. Typically, he or she will assign a weekly essay on topics selected in subject areas covered in those examinations. In your weekly “tutorial,” you will usually read your essay aloud to your tutor, followed by critique and discussion. You may be alone with your tutor, or more likely today share your tutorial with one or two colleagues reading the same material.*

Q9. I already have a B.A. Why would I want to get another? Isn’t it better to do a graduate degree?

A. *The Oxford B.A. is a very different degree, with far greater specialization, than one would get in one’s major in an American college. It is more equivalent in depth to an American M.A. (Indeed, an Oxford M.A. can usually be awarded automatically to someone with an Oxford B.A. seven years after matriculation.) More importantly, the B.A. provides the advantages of close individual supervision from one’s tutor, a renowned distinguishing characteristic of Oxford undergraduate education. But Americans should do the degree that best meets their interests. It rarely makes a significant difference in an American Rhodes Scholar’s subsequent career if the degree*

won is a B.A., M.Phil., M.Sc. by Research, M.Sc. by Coursework, M.Litt., D.Phil., or anything else. As explained above, however, most Americans in recent years have pursued masters' degrees, although doctorates are also popular.

For a general description of the available Oxford degrees, and more information describing the tutorial system, please review the Scholarship information section on the American Rhodes Scholarship web site, www.rhodesscholar.org, and the Undergraduate and Graduate Prospectuses, available from the web site.

Q10. I will already have an M.A. when I would attend Oxford. Would I still be eligible to receive a second B.A.?

A. Yes.

Q11. I plan to go to medical school, but I'd like to study something entirely different first. I was a biology major but would like to do a B.A. in English History, or perhaps Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE). I have only taken introductory courses in each. Does that make sense? Would the Rhodes Scholarship committee look more favorably on me if I applied to do a biology graduate degree?

A. *Some future physicians use Oxford to explore a different area of intellectual interest. Some Oxford B.A.s and master's courses require more preparation in the field than others. It is difficult to generalize, although most humanities and social science B.A. courses, and even some of the taught master's degree courses, can be attempted without an undergraduate major in the same field. There are exceptions, however. For example, the economics option in PPE has become very difficult for someone without a reasonably strong background in basic economics and mathematics for econometrics. If in doubt, consult with your institutional representative or your district secretary. On the other hand, one shouldn't fret too much regarding the finest details of your proposed area of study. If you are elected, you will have time to consult with the American Secretary's office, the Warden of Rhodes House in Oxford, and others regarding the proper degree and course to apply for. You may also have time to do courses in the American semester following your election to prepare you for a new area of study. Your degree declaration in your application—while it should be carefully considered and focused and will bear on the committee's judgment about the appropriateness of Oxford for you—is not cast in stone. The selection committee is looking for people who are likely to thrive at Oxford, and will not view anyone unfavorably based on the terribly precise fit of the specific course reflected in the application. And the committee is unlikely to view you any more favorably because you elect to stay in your academic field or move from it—as long as you have a cogent explanation for your choice, and have sufficient preparation to qualify for Oxford admission into the course. But candidates need be aware that changing one's degree program after admission to a program is extremely difficult at Oxford today, and may be impossible. One would not expect to be able to switch from a Ph.D. program in Political Science to one in History or in Economics at a U. S. graduate school; Oxford is no different.*

You might also consider some other popular interdisciplinary B.A.s: History and Politics; Economics and Management; Geography; History and Economics; History and English; or Human Sciences. Also consider the M.Phil. or M.Sc. in Global Health Science or in Medical Anthropology, the M.Sc. courses offered by the faculty of

Geography, or the M.Sc. in Economic and Social History (including the history of medicine).

Q12. I haven't studied much economics or political science, and no philosophy. Can I still do PPE?

A. *As mentioned above, the standards for economics in PPE have increased over the years, and the economics option is a stretch, perhaps an ill-advised one, for someone with no econometric grounding, or who does not plan to do work in economics in the spring of his or her senior year. Similarly, the philosophy papers can be quite demanding in PPE for the novice philosopher, but still possible. The "P and P" option is practicable for most without preparation in political science, philosophy, mathematics, or economics. (PPE can be taken by preparing for exams in all three subjects, or for any two—i.e., Philosophy, Politics and Economics; Philosophy and Politics; Politics and Economics; or Philosophy and Economics). You should also consider other new options, however, such as History and Politics; Economics and Management; Geography; History and Economics; History and English; or Human Sciences.*

PPE remains, however, a popular course for Americans with widely varying academic preparation, but far less so than it was in previous decades—in part due to the required depth in its component subjects, and in part due to the increasing number of popular master's degrees in social sciences.

Also consider the various M.Sc. degrees that provide interdisciplinary opportunities and instruction.

Q13. Is the MBA an eligible degree for Rhodes Scholars? Can they pursue other degrees in management offered by the University and the Said Business School?

A. *Effective with the 2008-2009 academic year, the MBA is again an eligible degree for Rhodes Scholars. However, the MBA and the Master in Financial Economics (MFE) may be pursued only in the Scholar's second year of study, following the completion of a different one-year degree the first year. All other management degrees, masters and doctoral, may be funded. Admission to either degree is not assured and will be highly competitive, especially for those applying to the MBA as Rhodes Scholars will be younger and lacking business experience as compared to other applicants. It is recommended that Rhodes Scholars considering application to the MBA pursue a one-year first degree in any field other than management. Rhodes Scholars interested in a doctorate in Management Studies may consider pursuing the M.Sc. in Management Studies in their first year, leading to a D.Phil., in which case fourth-year funding may be available through The Said Business School, assuming satisfactory progress during the first three years of study funded by The Rhodes Trust.*

Q14. I am interested in doing a four-year second B.A. course at Oxford. Since Rhodes Scholars are given senior status, is this a course I will be able to pursue?

A. *With senior status, you would be eligible to complete a four-year course in three years, but The Rhodes Trust does not fund three years for a second B.A., so this course is ineligible to a Rhodes Scholar. Also, we would not allow such an application even if you were to acknowledge that The Rhodes Trust would fund no more than two years and you were able to fund the third year yourself.*

- Q15. I'd like to get a doctorate in my field. Will The Rhodes Trust support all the fees to do so?
- A. *Assuming you remain in good standing, you should be able to, although that remains within the discretion of the Warden and Trustees. In the sciences and mathematics, a D.Phil. will usually be completed in three years, following entry with Probationer Research Status. In such cases, fees and stipend may be provided for all three years. In the social sciences and humanities, D.Phils. may usually only be commenced after a one or two-year master's course in the same field. In such cases, fees and stipends may be provided in the third year and should fourth-year fees be required, the Trustees, at their discretion, will provide the required fourth-year fees if the Scholar has no other external source for them. The Trust will not, however, provide a fourth-year stipend. But fourth-year living expenses in Oxford are usually available through teaching and other positions.*
- Q16. May I take a Diploma course as a Rhodes Scholar?
- A. *The Rhodes Trust does not fund the various one-year courses denoted as "diploma" courses.*
- Q17. I'm interested in doing the M.Litt. or M.Sc. by Research and I understand that those degrees are now being discouraged for Rhodes Scholars. Is that true?
- A. *While these courses are offered by the University and Rhodes Scholars are eligible to apply for them, we discourage them in favor of the D.Phil. Nowadays, the D.Phil. is the course of choice for most Rhodes Scholars, and doctorates are pursued by almost one-half of a typical American Rhodes class.*
- Also, it is now as common for Rhodes Scholars to take two one-year, taught, master's courses as it is for them to take the M.Phil., especially as there are many more one-year master's courses than M.Phils. being introduced each year.*

II. What Is Life Like At Oxford?

Q1. It's hard to learn much about all the different colleges at Oxford. How can I learn more? How much difference does it make which college I attend?

A. *It is hard to learn about the differences among Oxford's colleges without visiting them. But the web has made an enormous difference. Almost every college has an excellent and expansive web site. That information—plus that in the Undergraduate Prospectus (both available through the Rhodes Scholarship web site) should be sufficient. If you can supplement that with discussion with recently graduated Oxonians, that should give you most of what you might want to know. Moreover, if you are like the vast majority of Rhodes Scholarship applicants, and are likely to attend only if successful in a scholarship competition, you'll have some time—sufficient but not abundant—after you win a scholarship, to learn what you need to. Importantly, it should be noted that the vast majority of people come to enjoy the college in which they are placed very much indeed, even if it was not their first choice. Many Rhodes Scholars—just as other applicants—do not receive placements in their preferred college. This rarely makes the Oxford experience any less enjoyable. A few may find their best option to be to leave college choice to the Warden of Rhodes House. Finally, college choice is frankly less important for graduates than undergraduates because graduates' academic experience is at the University and not in the colleges.*

Q2. What's the social life like at Oxford?

A. *That is best to ask a recently returned Oxonian. In general, it is not terribly dissimilar from an American college, although some comments can probably be fairly made. Because the terms are short and the B.A. programs are quite demanding, term time is probably, on average, more academically focused than at most American institutions. On the other hand, the unique camaraderie of college MCRs, JCRs (the college-based social organizations for graduate students [including those reading for second B.A.s] and undergraduates respectively), and butteries (college snack bars)—combined with the popularity of countless pubs in the city—make a generally more social and gregarious environment than at many if not most American colleges. Weekend dorm room “parties” are replaced by daily gatherings for coffee and drinks in MCRs or pubs. The very existence of the many colleges facilitates extremely close friendships with perhaps the most cosmopolitan cross section of international students in the world. The small size of the colleges—from about 200 to about 500 students (with an average of about 350)—where most meals are taken and most sports and many societies are housed, and most, if not all B.A. instruction is provided, also fosters far closer relationships than the norm in most U. S. institutions. And one should remind oneself, of course, that while we share a common language, British and American culture—academic and social—are still quite foreign to each other, the source of additional appeal to most (although of consternation to a few who are unrealistic about the cultural differences, especially that British universities are less, shall I say, consumer-driven than many American ones have become in recent years).*

Q3. How hard is the work? I want to go but I also want to have a good time after four years of very hard work in college.

A. *The work is as hard as one might expect at one of the world's most distinguished universities. The pace and rhythm of the work is very different from most American institutions, however. Most Americans work hard indeed, but have time—term time and*

during vacations—to enjoy the special splendors of Oxford, England, Europe, and even beyond. But those who plan to spend most of their vacations and even many of their weekends traveling can expect some strain with their academic supervisor. Scholars are required to reside in Oxford during term time except where they obtain the permission of the Warden.

Q4. I like the idea of traveling in the summers and long vacations. Do many Rhodes Scholars do that? How expensive is it? How hard is travel with the workload?

A. *Most Rhodes Scholars do travel during their vacations (which last six weeks between the three eight-week terms and about four months in the summer). The amount they travel typically depends more on their interests and their academic workloads than on their means. (The Rhodes Scholarship stipend is generous enough to support some travel and most Scholars try to supplement the stipend with personal resources for extensive travel). It is probably a safe generalization that Scholars reading second B.A.s have more time to travel during vacations than those pursuing graduate degrees who are expected to be working full time—while B.A. students and taught masters' students may be busier academically during the terms than are research degree graduate students. But see my comments to the question immediately above.*

Q5. Is the stipend sufficient to cover all my expenses?

A. *It should be. You can get by with no personal supplements, but some personal resources facilitate more travel, dining out, entertainment, excursions to events in London, etc. And college fees vary. Those likely to have no financial resources to supplement their stipend may wish to consider the varying level of college fees for room and board when they make a college selection.*

Q6. I would like to take up a new sport like rowing or rugby at Oxford. Is that easy to do?

A. *Absolutely. The “amateur” tradition is alive and well at Oxford. While participation at Oxford University’s varsity level (a “full Blue” for major sports or “half Blue” for minor sports) is of a reasonably high standard, there are countless ways to participate meaningfully as a novice in the abundant college-level teams.*

Q7. Are there many African Americans at Oxford?

A. *Oxford has long been a vibrant multi-racial community, with students of all races from all around the world. While Americans of color will not see as many fellow Americans of color as on a typical American campus, the overall percentage of people of color from all countries is getting closer each year to that at most American institutions.*

Q8. I hear feminism is far less advanced in England than here. Will I be comfortable there?

A. *All of Oxford’s colleges are now coeducational, and the experience of women since the formerly all-male colleges became coeducational has generally been excellent. More than 40% of all Oxford students are women today, this only approximately 30 years after most of Oxford’s colleges began to admit women. Oxford is very proud of its traditions and history, and for hundreds of years, those were traditions and histories defined and celebrated by men. That may lend a certain “maleness” to aspects of the institutional spirit. However, that does not necessarily translate into discrimination or*

ill treatment. All in all, it is probably safe to say that most women may have the same mix of encouraging and frustrating experiences at Oxford colleges as at their current colleges or universities, and that conditions improve in various ways every year.

Q9. Can Oxford accommodate people with disabilities?

A. *Usually, yes—and improvements are made every year. Rhodes Scholarships can be offered to people with virtually any disability. We have, for example, elected Rhodes Scholars with profound sight or hearing impairments, who are wheelchair dependent, and with chronic disease. Particular colleges' ability to accommodate can be explored with the American Secretary.*

Q10. Someone told me that Oxford is snobby and that many (and maybe most) of the students went to fancy “public” schools (in the British context, this means “private” or “independent”). What’s it really like?

A. *Oxford has become fiercely meritocratic over the past several decades, and it is now more sensitive than ever to the importance of access for those from unprivileged backgrounds. If anything, those very few Americans who attend Oxford every year expecting to cavort with young titled gentry become disappointed by the reality. While it is true that Oxford, Cambridge, and other major British universities still educate a large number of students from “public” schools, those who are admitted from such schools are there for proven academic excellence in state-sponsored exams and not because of social or economic standing or legacy. In fact, Oxford has a more democratic policy in this regard than leading American universities do.*

Q11. I’m on full scholarship now and my family is not well off. Will I be out of place at Oxford?

A. *Absolutely not. Higher education in Britain is largely publicly funded and a high percentage of Oxford students are from families of modest means.*

Q12. I am married and interested in applying. Can I apply? What opportunities are available to my spouse at Oxford? Is the stipend sufficient for a married couple? Is there married student housing?

A. *Married applicants may apply. Some, but not all colleges have married student housing; many married students choose to use their Rhodes Scholarship stipend to rent accommodations in Oxford on their own. It would be very difficult for a married couple to live on the Rhodes Scholarship stipend alone (there is no special stipend for married students); supplemental private funds are virtually essential. Spouses are now able to obtain permits to work legally in Britain.*

Q13. I know the Rhodes Scholarships do not discriminate based on race, sex, disability, marital status, financial status or sexual orientation. What are Oxford’s comparable policies?

A. *The Rhodes Trust and Oxford University require that selection for a Scholarship and for admission to the University will be without regard to marital status, race, ethnic origin, colour, religion, sexual orientation, social background, or disability.*

III. What Does The Application Process Involve?

Q1. What must I do to apply?

A. *The process is described on the U. S. Rhodes Scholarship web site, www.rhodesscholar.org. Any special rules or deadlines established by your college to earn its endorsement are determined by your Rhodes Scholarship institutional representative (his or her name appears on the web site).*

Very briefly, you will need from five to eight letters of recommendation, the endorsement of your institution, a personal essay, a certified transcript, a list of activities, a photograph and proof of citizenship. Preparation should probably begin by the spring of your junior year as deadlines for receipt of applications and letters fall in early October.

Q2. The essay seems very important. Can you give me any advice?

A. *The essay is very important, and one should approach it conscientiously. Until the interview (if you are selected for one), it is an important way—along with the letters of referees and the endorsement letter of your institution—to get a sense of who you are, how you think, how you write, and what you aspire to. Committees realize that it cannot be guaranteed that an essay is not reviewed or critiqued by anyone else—although that is our desire and is the reason we ask that it be certified as one’s own work. Usually, however, it is evident to committees when an essay has effectively been written by one’s advisor(s), or by committee, or when it has been so heavily edited that it is no longer the applicant’s voice. Such essays are not useful.*

Q3. When am I likely to hear if I’m to be interviewed?

A. *There is no set date. Given the high numbers of applicants in each district and the care taken by selectors, it could be as little as a week before the interviews.*

Q4. What are the interviews like? If I’m selected for an interview, is there some way I can prepare? Do mock interviews help?

A. *No two interviews are alike. Although colorful folklore persists about the interviews, they are intended to bring out the candidate’s strengths. Most of the time may be spent exploring the candidate’s primary interests, or perhaps points developed in the essay. Some questions may explore extracurricular interests. Others might probe general knowledge outside a person’s field to assess breadth, or more often, just how a candidate thinks. There are rarely “right” or “wrong” answers. Committee members are instructed to put candidates at ease, but they are also expected to challenge and stretch candidates in a fair and even-handed manner, so the interviews are rigorous. If a candidate doesn’t know the answer to a question, he or she should simply admit so. Questions should never embarrass a candidate, nor are “points” ever given or taken away due to ideological, political or religious views. Many if not most candidates—successful or otherwise—admit afterwards how much they enjoyed the intellectual dialogue, and concede that they were surprised, and disappointed, that the interview seemed to end so quickly.*

The committee members are chosen each year by the American Secretary and rotate off regularly. They are chosen for a balance of professions, interests, ages and backgrounds. They include men and women of distinction in many walks of life. There is always at least one scientist. The chair is never a Rhodes Scholar. They are given no formulas, quotas, or goals of any kind—simply the task of choosing those whom they personally believe best meet Cecil Rhodes’ intent.

Many institutions conduct mock interviews with a panel of faculty members. We encourage that—for the practice and the comfort. If your college doesn’t arrange that, you might request it. If it cannot be arranged, you might even ask some friends to do it. Even if you are unsuccessful, the experience is likely to be helpful for many other occasions in your career. Of course, it should be obvious that the committee is interested in your own views, ideals, and accomplishments, and not in what a college advisory committee urges you to say or how to say it.

- Q5. How long do the interviews last? Are there ever reinterviews?
- A. *Interviews can be anywhere from 15 to 30 or more minutes. Most are probably about 20 to 25 minutes. Reinterviews may occur after all candidates have been interviewed, at the committee’s discretion. Reinterviews can range from one or two minutes to ten minutes or more.*
- Q6. I don’t know any “famous” professors? Are letters from junior faculty or even graduate students alright?
- A. *Letters from people who know you well are far more valuable than letters from well-known people who know you less well and who might write, at best, a form-like letter. If you were exceptionally active in sports or organizations during high school that you have had to abandon during college, it may be useful to have a referee who can speak about your secondary school record.*
- Q7. How important is it to have eight letters? The application says five is sufficient.
- A. *It is desirable to have as many letters as possible (up to eight) from people who know you well, and preferably in different ways. Four must be from college or graduate school instructors. But adding letters beyond five from people who barely know you usually does more harm than good. Occasionally, a letter of reference may not arrive, however, and if you request exactly four letters from university instructors, and one is not received, you risk being disqualified.*
- Q8. I can apply either from my home state (a small state without many colleges or universities), or where I go to college (a large state with many selective colleges). How should I decide what to do? What difference does it make?
- A. *With the new district scheme established in 2005, the number of applicants should be approximately equal in all districts, so the choice of state (and thus district) should be made on convenience.*

Q9. I go to college in X (a very large populous state), but grew up and went to high school in Y (a small state in another region of the country) where my family still lives and I'm legally resident. If I apply from there, will the committee regard me unfavorably because I left the state for college?

A. *It will not.*

Q10. I grew up in X state until 10th grade, when my family moved to Y state where I attended high school. I now attend a university in a third state. Can I apply as a representative of Y? Of X?

A. *With respect to state Y, yes, as long as you are a legal resident of Y. This can be indicated by a combination of factors including voting and motor vehicle registration, tax returns and other indicia of residence or continuing connection. It is highly unlikely you would be eligible in state X. No one can be eligible in more than two states (e.g., because of a family's vacation home). Applicants who are applying from a graduate school or a college to which he or she has transferred in a different state must carefully study the rules set forth in the application and regulations regarding state eligibility.*

Q11. What are the specific rules to determine state eligibility? I'm confused.

A. *No uniform or clear rules of state or legal residence exist under American law. But in order to be consistent, we provide this guidance to district secretaries to determine eligibility in the "non-university" state:*

- (1) A person must have been a legal resident of the state in question on April 15 of the year of application. That can be established if (a) that state had been the primary residence of his/her family immediately before he/she attended college, (b) remained his/her family's primary residence on April 15 of the year of application, AND (c) when the applicant has not established residency in a different state before April 15 in a capacity other than as a full-time student; OR*
- (2) If there is no other state (including the "university state") where (a) there are MORE indicia of residence, AND (b) at least TWO of the following indicia are established:*
 - He/she was registered to vote in that state on that April 15.*
 - He/she filed a state income tax form for that state on or before that April 15.*
 - He/she had a valid driver's license from that state on that April 15.*
 - His/her parents, or primary custodial parent, maintained their or his/her primary residence in that state on that April 15.*
 - He/she had his/her primary checking account in that state on that April 15.*
- (3) In the case of U. S. citizens who have lived abroad most if not all of their lives and who do not meet (1) or (2) above, they may only apply in their state of eligibility by reason of college or university training.*
- (4) No one will ever be eligible in more than two states. When it appears that an applicant has applied in a state when there may be two other states of eligibility, the American Secretary will make a binding decision.*
- (5) If someone has applied in a state in good faith where he or she is deemed ineligible, the American Secretary will redirect the dossier to an eligible state, time allowing.*

- (6) *Once establishing the right to apply as a resident of a state under our rules, the degree of connection to that state is irrelevant and may not be considered.*
- (7) *In all cases of uncertainty regarding residence, the decision of the American Secretary will be final.*

Q12. I have dual citizenship. May I apply?

A. *Yes. You may apply as long as you are a U. S. citizen.*

Q13. I am a British citizen. I have lived in the United States since I was ten and all my schooling above the elementary level has taken place in the U.S. My family and I have applied for U.S. citizenship and expect to be naturalized. If I am a dual citizen by the time I apply for the Rhodes Scholarship, am I eligible for the award?

A. *Yes, if you are a U.S. citizen (sole or dual) before October 1 in the year in which you apply, you are eligible.*

Q14. Some of my recommenders are abroad, and I am unable to personally deliver the needed cover sheet from the application package to them. Would the committee accept an electronic signature, such as my name in capital letters on the form, in lieu of my hand-written signature? I would like to be able to email the cover sheet to them; otherwise, I will need to find a way to fax it, which may be difficult. Is this email route acceptable?

A. *Yes, that would be fine.*

Q15. I am in the process of applying for a Rhodes Scholarship, and have two people who are willing to write references for me, but whose native languages are not English. They would feel more comfortable writing in their native languages and it would be a lot less work for them. Must the references be in English?

A. *They are acceptable, but they would have to provide for an English translation, which you could pay for. We would need the original and translation to be sent to the state secretary, and neither should come from you.*

Q16. I have studied outside the United States, and have asked some of my overseas professors for letters of reference. Since I know one or more of the letters will be need to be translated, how should I best advise them?

A. *The original letter, signed by the referee, must be submitted, along with any translation to English, also signed by the translator. While copies may be emailed or faxed to meet deadlines, the originals must also be submitted by the referee to the respective Rhodes district secretary. If the applicant is selected for interview, the file must contain originals and be complete.*

Q17. I will be doing field work in Africa when the interviews are conducted. May I be interviewed at a different time or place?

A. *No. All candidates must appear at the time and place set for interview. There are no exceptions. Attendance at the reception before interviews is not mandatory, though it is extraordinarily rare for a candidate not to appear at the reception, and is strongly discouraged unless the conflicting obligation is of enormous importance.*

- Q18. I am a musician. May I submit a tape?
- A. *You may not. Committees do not accept audio or video tapes, copies of articles written, portfolios, etc. Rarely, a committee may ask a candidate to provide such, but they are never accepted unsolicited.*
- Q19. I have already graduated from college and have been working for the past year. Even though the application states to include “activities in honors in college,” should I include additional information to reflect my honors and activities since graduation?
- A. *Yes, that is fine and appropriate.*
- Q20. I am currently in graduate school. Should my undergraduate or graduate institution provide the required endorsement?
- A. *An undergraduate institution may endorse an applicant who has satisfactorily completed two years of full-time study and received a bachelor’s degree, or will have in the year following the Rhodes Scholarship application. It is preferred that applicants in their first year of graduate study receive an endorsement from their undergraduate institution from which they received their degree; for those in the second or later year of graduate study, the preference is for the endorsement to come from the graduate institution.*
- Q21. I already attend Oxford. May I apply?
- A. *Yes. It does not matter where you have attended school or university as long as you are a U. S. citizen.*
- Q22. Must I submit a separate application to Oxford, or does the Rhodes application take the place of the Oxford application?
- A. *You may apply independently to Oxford if you wish to attend regardless of whether you win a Rhodes Scholarship. If you will attend only if you win, there is no need to apply independently.*
- Q23. I have taken courses at institutions other than my endorsing university. However, all of the courses have transferred and are listed on my graduating university’s transcript. Must I still submit transcripts from each of the other universities? I only took a few courses from each, and mainly during the summers.
- A. *As long as the courses you took are on the transcript from your endorsing institution, you do not need to submit separate transcripts.*

IV. *What Are My Chances?*

Q1. I don't go to an Ivy League or "elite" college and wonder whether I should bother applying. What can you advise?

A. *Almost every year, a Rhodes Scholar is elected from an institution that has never had one before. In the last eight classes alone, 10 colleges or universities had their first winners. Since the inception of the scholarships, Rhodes Scholars have been elected from more than 300 different institutions. In recent years, approximately a third of the 32 U. S. winners attend colleges and universities that are public, not listed as highly selective in their admissions, or not well known outside of their state or region. At the same time, it should not be surprising that multiple winners frequently come from institutions that are highly selective and need-blind in their admissions, and that recruit actively in all 50 states.*

While institutions understandably take pride in winners who come from their ranks, it bears emphasis that individuals win Rhodes Scholarships, not colleges.

The only "guarantee" is that if you don't apply, you can't win.

Finally, it is our firm conviction that while institutions obviously differ in the degree to which they may support or encourage applications, once an applicant applies he or she will not be disadvantaged by a lack of the level and experience of institutional knowledge and support of the application process.

Q2. I will probably graduate in the top 10% of my class. Is that good enough to meet the academic requirement of the Scholarship? Is there a minimum GPA?

A. *Intellectual distinction is the most important criterion, but it cannot be measured by grades or college academic honors alone. Reference letters (or letters from "referees" as they are described in the application form) and the interviews for those candidates selected for them, are extremely important as well. There is no minimum GPA to be considered for a Rhodes Scholarship although some Oxford departments may establish GPA requirements for certain degrees (usually 3.8), and, obviously grading standards vary substantially across U. S. institutions. Committee members who are familiar with Oxford's examination classification system are instructed to ensure that we select only candidates of whom it could be reasonably predicted that, if they were to "read for" (in Oxford terminology, "study for") a B.A. degree at Oxford, they would be classified high in Oxford's 2:1 category or better (Oxford examinations are graded into Firsts, Upper Seconds [2:1], Lower Seconds [2:2], Thirds, and Fails). This translates roughly, for those unfamiliar with Oxford standards, to someone who would probably graduate in the top 10% of America's most selective and competitive institutions. Obviously, intellectual distinction above that standard is viewed very favorably, as is great distinction in any of the other criteria. Another useful measure might be admission to U. S. graduate schools: if it is unlikely that you would be admitted to one of the very most selective U. S. graduate programs in your primary field, it is unlikely that you will win a Rhodes Scholarship.*

Q3. How important really are sports? I don't even play intramurals. I did a little in high school, but in college, the most I do athletically is walk to classes and jog occasionally. To tell you the truth, I'm pretty uncoordinated. But I'm fit. Does that disqualify me? What should I put on my application?

A. *One of the criteria cited in Cecil Rhodes' Will was ". . . the energy to use one's talents to the full, as exemplified by fondness for and success in sports." In this regard, we look first for energetic applicants who make maximum use of their abilities. As with all the criteria in Mr. Rhodes' Will—the evolution of Oxford, the experience of one hundred years of the Scholarships, views of the Rhodes Trustees and selection committees as to why Mr. Rhodes listed success in sports as important, and the necessarily (and appropriately) subjective views of our rotating selectors all color the interpretation. I think it's fair to say today, however, that only rarely does athletic distinction alone tip the scales for a selection committee. Certainly, the absence of any organized sports does not disqualify anyone. The committees do, however, look for evidence of energy and vigor, which sports—or other activities—can provide. Certain successes in sports may also reflect critical qualities of leadership and teamwork. Sadly, success in major varsity sports at large colleges and universities has often required a virtually semi-professional time commitment in the U. S. (unlike at Oxford), making it very difficult, although not impossible, for such athletes to develop the other criteria we look for. But it is also fair to say that unusual athletic distinction is a plus, and should be so viewed by committees. With respect to what you should put on the application—as in other contexts, be honest.*

Q4. How important are community or college charitable activities to demonstrate the quality or "concern for others." Should I volunteer to work in a shelter, do tutoring, or something like that?

A. *Concern for others is critical, but it can be reflected in countless ways aside from direct hands-on charitable work. Reference padding, with sudden and extensive charitable activity in one's junior year for example, is usually transparent to committees. One can be a great contributor to mankind without having spent hundreds of hours (or even any) while in college doing volunteer work. On the other hand, major, original, long-standing or leadership positions in charitable organizations may be a meaningful indication of future contribution, commitments and vigor, or it may not be.*

Q5. I am a physics major, plan a career in physics, and have little interest whatsoever in government or politics, although I am very interested in some public issues. Can I still be considered?

A. *Absolutely. We look for people who will be leaders in any field. Leading physicists can certainly contribute as much to the world as leaders in more conventionally "public" professions. But, let me stress that the Rhodes Scholarships are not simply graduate fellowships at Oxford, intended to support the best physicists (or economists or historians or politicians or students of French literature) to come to Oxford. We are looking for the best physicists (or economists or historians or politicians or students of French literature) who are likely to make the most positive contributions to the world—broadly defined.*

- Q6. I am an English major and my major interest is writing poetry. I don't play sports and politics turns me off. Could I still be a plausible candidate?
- A. *Absolutely. The committee will look for breadth, character, leadership, vigor and concern for others in many ways.*
- Q7. Do you have quotas, or unofficial targets, for women, minorities, academic fields, or undergraduate institutions?
- A. *Absolutely not. Indeed, those familiar with our process would know that it would be impossible even if it were intended or desired. Sixteen independent selection committees around the country—with balanced membership that varies year to year and that decides based on the majority's necessarily individual and subjective judgments—announce their decisions virtually simultaneously late on the day of election. Each committee chooses those it believes to be the strongest candidates. There is not, and should not be, any "ticket-balancing." Until the national results are phoned in to my office, it is impossible to predict the outcome. Theoretically—although certainly highly unlikely—we could elect 32 women or 32 men, representing 32 fields of study or one, from 32 different institutions or one.*
- Q8. Do women have the same chance as men?
- A. *Yes. In most years, the number of men and women elected closely mirrors the percentages of those applying.*
- Q9. I've never traveled very far, even outside my state, and have never been out of the country. Will that disadvantage me in the competition?
- A. *Absolutely not. Every year, some Rhodes Scholars' first trip to Washington, D. C. is for the traditional "departure luncheon," and their first trip out of the country is to Oxford.*
- Q10. I have been admitted already to Oxford and can afford to go on my own. Will this hurt my chances?
- A. *No. It will neither help nor hurt.*
- Q11. I spent my junior year abroad at Oxford. Will that either help me or hurt me?
- A. *It will neither help you nor hurt you.*
- Q12. I know only a little about Oxford and I don't know anyone who's ever gone there. Will the committee expect me to know in much detail the specific reasons I want to go to Oxford, whom I'd study with, etc., or is it enough to know that I'd love to study economics there?
- A. *Committees do not expect detailed and intimate knowledge of Oxford. They look for sincere desire to study there (Committees try hard to screen out those sharp-elbowed applicants interested in the great honor only, and not in applying themselves at Oxford), a reasonable plan of study, and a likelihood of thriving.*

- Q13. Nobody has ever won a Rhodes Scholarship from my college. It seems like a lot of work—for me and for my professors. How can I know if I have a chance?
- A. *First, see question IV-1, above. This is a very hard question to answer. It's probably best to discuss this with your institutional representative, who, in turn, is encouraged to discuss it with the district secretary or with the American Secretary.*
- Q14. I'm considering taking a year off after college to do X, but would like to compete for a Rhodes Scholarship the following year. Does it hurt my chances if I wait to apply one (or more) years after finishing college?
- A. *As long as you don't pass the age limit, you may still apply. Committees take care to assure that older applicants are not advantaged in any way, so will take into account the expected additional maturity, distinctions, experiences, etc., that someone who has already graduated may have. But it is certainly not uncommon for someone one or even more years out of college to win a Scholarship, and occasionally the development and accomplishments that follow one's junior year in college can make for a stronger candidacy. You should also take into consideration, however, the logistical difficulty of arranging reference letters when you're away from your undergraduate institution. Finally, for those thinking of taking a "year off," be aware that the Rhodes Trust does not allow deferral of an award. Winners must take residence at Oxford in the October following election.*
- Q15. Are my chances less (or more) if I apply to do a one-year degree rather than a two-year degree or a D.Phil.?
- A. *No. We strongly believe that Rhodes Scholars do themselves and Oxford a disservice if they remain only one year, but selectors are asked not to consider this in their deliberations. Most Americans find their enjoyment of Oxford—intellectual and social—even exponentially better in their second year than their first, when cultural and academic differences can be initially challenging. Those Rhodes Scholars doing a one-year degree are well advised to plan to do a different one-year course in their second year. Those applications are made when already at Oxford, and committees, nor the University, will be concerned if you are uncertain regarding your preferred second degree at the time of your application.*

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