

TRAINING MODULE: INTERVIEWING

TAAP volunteers have the face-to-face opportunity to meet and interact with Tufts applicants. The purpose of an interview is to:

- personalize the application process, especially in the framework of our large and competitive applicant pool.
- answer an applicant's questions about Tufts.
- gather information about an applicant that may not have surfaced in an application itself (i.e. motivations and interests, how/why they've become involved in various activities, the overall match/fit with Tufts).
- fill in the gaps that may exist in an application.
- highlight certain parts of the applicant's experience.
- foster a candidate's excitement about Tufts.

Interviews generally last between forty minutes and one hour, and should feel more like a conversation rather than a question and answer session. Please note that TAAP interviews are not required and the applicant opts into the TAAP interview process via the Tufts Supplement. If the applicant chooses to decline the interview when contacted by a TAAP member, they have the right to do so without penalty or judgment.

After the interview is completed, an interview report should be composed and submitted to the admissions office (interview logistics and reports are discussed below). While good interview reports provide information that can add depth to the student's application for admission, they do not dictate or define an admission decision. We respect your opinions and value both the information you provide and the time you spend with these candidates. However, no single credential, including alumni interview reports, can dictate decisions to the admissions committee - either positive or negative. Just as an applicant will not be admitted or denied based on standardized test scores alone, neither will a student be admitted or denied based solely on the content of an interview report. It is important to understand that ***your input will not be treated as a recommendation but rather as a critical piece of information about an applicant's attributes.***

IMPACT OF THE INTERVIEW

The role the TAAP interview plays in the admissions process at Tufts exists on two levels. First, the information gleaned from TAAP interview reports enhances the admissions committees' ability to evaluate applicants both in the context of their respective communities, and as a fit for Tufts. Second, those applicants who are fortunate enough to enjoy a TAAP interview have an additional opportunity to personally connect with Tufts and are more likely to explore the University to greater depth. Please note that TAAP is not a tool for judging candidates as either admissible or inadmissible. Instead TAAP exists to promote the Tufts experience and to create opportunities to know our applicants in a more complete and personalized way.

In 2010-2011, over 3,500 TAAP volunteers completed over 9,000 interviews (of 17,130 applicants). Data shows that admitted applicants who request and receive a TAAP interview are more likely to enroll than those who are not interviewed. Given this fact we remain committed to working with individual chairs and committees to recruit new members and continue progress toward interviewing as many applicants as possible.

LOGISTICS OF THE INTERVIEW

Applicants to Tufts have a one-time opportunity on the Tufts Supplemental Application to opt into TAAP for an alumni interview. The information of an applicant who requests an interview is uploaded to *TAAP Online*, making it available for the corresponding regional TAAP Chairperson to assign the interview to one of their TAAP committee members.

Once an interview is assigned, an email is sent informing the interviewer of the assignment. The interviewer should then log into *TAAP Online* to accept (or decline) the interview assignment and view the applicant's information. *TAAP Online* will provide the most accurate information we have about a candidate, including the student's name, email, current address, telephone number, high school name, academic interests, extracurricular involvement and whether the applicant is applying to the School of Arts & Sciences or the School of Engineering.

The return date, a target date for completion of the interview and TAAP interview report, is automatically set for three weeks after the interview assignment is generated. The return date may be less than three weeks if the student has applied under the Early Decision program and the deadline is approaching. If this is the case, it is important to complete the interview by the appropriate return date. We encourage you to contact the applicant as soon as possible after you receive the assignment and attempt to complete the interview in a timely fashion. When a TAAP report is received by its return date, volunteers can be assured that the interview report will play a role in the complete evaluation of a candidate. If you are not able to submit the report by the return date, please submit the interview report as soon as possible after the interview is completed – it will still be evaluated during final admission committee review. If you must take additional time to complete an interview, or if you cannot complete an assigned interview, please make your TAAP Chairperson aware of the situation. Also, if you are unable make contact with an assigned candidate after several attempts please choose the “Contacted by not interviewed” radio button on the student's interview form in TAAP Online and include in the note space that you were unable to reach the student.

INTERVIEW LOCATION

When considering interview locations, take into account the location of the student's home and high school. Consider what will be a comfortable setting for the student. Public libraries, coffee shops, or the student's school are ideal locations. Understand that students may feel uncomfortable in your home and that parents may be uneasy about sending their son or daughter into the home of a stranger. Interviews should not be conducted in your home or office.

PARENTS

The role of parents in the college selection process is significant. Whenever possible, invite them to meet you to discuss their questions before or after the interview. Avoid including them in the interview as their presence may inhibit or overshadow their son or daughter.

There may be times that the parents wish to be included in the interview. In some instances, this raises the question of cultural and language differences for the interviewer and the family. Inviting parents to meet with you before the interview may help to alleviate any questions or concerns.

INTERVIEWING STUDENTS YOU KNOW

TAAP volunteers should refrain from interviewing a candidate when that individual is related to the TAAP member or when a professional or personal relationship exists between the TAAP member and the candidate or the candidate's family. Alumni may wish to write a letter of recommendation in

these instances, but should request the Chairperson assign another member of the committee to complete the interview. TAAP members who have a son or daughter in the applicant pool **should not** interview students from their child's high school and are asked to notify their TAAP Chairperson and the admissions office by emailing the program manager (admissions.taap@ase.tufts.edu).

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

Regardless of how calm and self assured a candidate may appear, remember he or she may be nervous. Set a conversational tone and remember that if you are comfortable and relaxed, the student will likely follow suit. Begin the interview with non-threatening topics; for example ask them about how senior year is going. During your conversation you should let the discussion flow naturally, aware that you may need to direct the conversation if there is a lull. The candidate should not be forced to carry the conversation, nor should he or she be asked stressful questions (“if you were a vegetable, which would you be?”), or potentially embarrassing questions about personal matters (“do you have a boyfriend?”). Your questions should focus on subjects that may be of interest to the candidate. Throughout the interview if you sense you’ve touched on a topic in which the student is particularly interested, ask follow up questions to find out the story behind the story. Use the student’s answers to guide you. Understand that an effective interview highlights an applicant’s interests and experiences in a way that illuminates their character, strengths and motivations.

Before the interview season begins, it is recommended that all TAAP members review updated admissions materials and well as the admissions and university websites. It is a good refresher that will reinforce the messages that define the Tufts experience. Also, please review the application so that you are aware of the information and credentials that make-up an application. Essay topics are constructed in a way that allows us to learn key information about the candidates and to assess their “fit” or “match” with Tufts. As a part of an interview you may want to ask a general question to gather their thoughts on the Tufts application and its essays. To view the current Tufts application, visit: <http://admissions.tufts.edu/?pid=109>.

The following topics areas that you might discuss with an applicant:

STUDENT AND FAMILY BACKGROUND

Begin the interview by talking about a subject that is comfortable and familiar such as the student's family. The application will tell us where the student currently lives; ask if she has always lived there. If they have moved around a lot, find out more. The application will tell us about their parents' and siblings' education- what more can you find out? Is education important to this family? Are they influenced by the choices made by family members? Information about relationships with siblings or parents can also tell us a little about the student's character. For example, if they have siblings, have they ever shared a room with one? What was that like? If you find out a grandparent lives in the home, ask what is challenging about having three generations under one roof or what has their grandfather taught them since moving in.

While most students are comfortable talking about their families, some are not. If you sense some discomfort with the topic, you should move on.

ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

Information describing the courses that a student has pursued and achievement in those courses will be available to the staff member reviewing the file. **As an interviewer, you should avoid specific questions about grades, rank and test scores.** The interview should focus on *why* the applicant has selected a particular academic program and how they respond to challenges. Why have they chosen

the courses they are taking senior year? What courses challenge the student? How do they respond to these challenging classes? Gaining an understanding of how a candidate's academic interests have developed and the courses which have special interest can prove helpful. In general, attempt to find out more about the student's academic preparation: ability to write, analyze, discuss and think critically. Discuss the student's attitude towards learning: motivation, commitment, use of potential, preferred learning environment, intellectual maturity and ability to work without structure.

EXTRACURRICULAR INVOLVEMENT

The application will require candidates to list activities, travel and work experience. Try to understand the significance of a student's extracurricular involvement and their level of interest. As the interviewer, you may gain a better understanding of the energy an applicant invests in an activity and the impact that the student has made on the school or community. Have the student's activities or achievements been above average or attracted local or national recognition? What is it about the activity that gives the student satisfaction? Why does the student get up at 5:00am to go to swim practice? Why did they take a service trip to New Orleans? What surprised them or challenged them on the service trip? What kind of leadership has the student assumed in high school?

INTERESTS

A student need not have a clear commitment to an area of study or vocation. At the time of the interview, it may be helpful to discuss what academic or career interests a student has and *how* these interests developed. Who or what has drawn them to a particular field? Also, it is helpful to gauge the level of exposure a student has had to his/her interests or vocational choices and how long a student has held these interests. Are the student's interests grounded on a good understanding of the field or vocation or on careful research?

COLLEGE CRITERION

Refrain from asking candidates about other colleges or universities they are considering or how Tufts rates among their college choices. The level of interest in Tufts may increase as a result of their contact with you. However, it is helpful to have an understanding of how the candidate is going about the task of selecting a college or university. What criteria are important to a student in evaluating a college or university? Who is assisting the student in the selection process? What expectations does the applicant have of a university?

Note that it is inappropriate to formally or informally compare the academic programs, student life or relative strengths and weaknesses of other institutions.

EXPOSURE TO TUFTS

How has the student's interest in Tufts developed? Do not feel you need to detail every reason in your interview report. If the student has a particularly interesting connection to our mission or a particular program you should certainly include it in the interview report, but you do not need to spend the time rewriting the Viewbook. Does the candidate know students on campus or alumni of the university? Exploring these questions frequently leads to a better understanding of an applicant's perspective of the university and can help you discover what they want to know more about.

DIVERSITY

The admissions office is committed to the recruitment, matriculation and retention of qualified students of color. All people, regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, age, mental or physical disability or sexual orientation are welcome to apply and matriculate at Tufts. When interviewing candidates, TAAP members should be careful to avoid comments and language that may be

construed as biased in any way that would lead a student to feel he or she is unwelcome. We believe that an interview allows students to highlight their achievements and success in the context of their own identity and lived experience – let them share what they wish without the judgment.

Making assumptions about students who have a different social, ethnic, racial, or socio-economic background may lead to misunderstandings between interviewers and students. It is best to approach each student whom you interview in the same manner. As the candidate begins to open up, the differences in background, race or ethnicity may provide a stepping stone to further questions. For example, if a student mentions an organization, an activity or a talent with which you are unfamiliar, and that may be associated with a particular race, ethnicity or culture, you may want to ask questions that highlights the student's interest.

It is important that all students be afforded the respect and equity in all aspects of the admissions process. The guidelines suggested in this section are useful across the spectrum of students you will meet.

ENDING THE INTERVIEW

When the interview concludes, thank the student for participating in the interview. It is appropriate to wish them good luck in their studies, activities, and the college selection process. Regardless of any misgivings you may have about the conversation, we want the student to have positive feelings about the experience and about Tufts. The following is important- do not assess a candidate's chance for admission. You should ask if there are any additional questions. Refer the student to the Regional Representatives Program:

<https://webcenter.studentservices.tufts.edu/Admissions/RegionReps/>

This is a program where current students, organized by state, have posted their email addresses on the admissions website in order to answer questions from prospective students. If the parents are present or waiting, take a few minutes to answer any outstanding questions.

THE TAAP INTERVIEW REPORT

The TAAP interview report should reflect the goals of the interview in:

- revealing new information about a candidate (“filling in the gaps”).
- confirming talents or personal characteristics.
- enhancing the visibility of particular parts of the student's application.
- providing impressions of the candidate that might not be accurately reflected in the application materials.

A TAAP report is most helpful when it highlights the conversation the interviewer has with the applicant and provides impressions or observations about the student and their potential contributions to the Tufts community. Think of the interview report as more editorial than narrative. Your editorial comments help us better understand the applicant. Reports listing activities or courses are unhelpful because the admissions officer will easily find this information elsewhere in the application. Information routinely received about each candidate from the application, the secondary school report, the high school transcript, the SAT and SAT Subject Tests or ACT scores, and/or examination results within the country of origin need not be repeated in your report. You should focus on the significance of the student's academic interests, achievements and expectations for college. Talk about the student's motivations and character or about challenges they have faced if they have been revealed in your conversation.

Your assessment of the student's personality, maturity, warmth, sense of humor, command of the English language, knowledge of themselves, the community, and the world, and ability to communicate ideas are appropriate. Please offer any insight you may have which may not otherwise be available to the admissions office.

Prompts for TAAP reports are provided. The prompts, available on the *TAAP Online* TAAP report, help guide the interviewer in sharing the information about a candidate that will be most helpful to the admissions committees. The current TAAP report prompts are as follows:

- What prompted the applicant to apply to Tufts? How thoughtful were they in sharing their interest(s) in the University?
- How would you characterize the applicant's presence and engagement during your time together?
- What thoughts, strengths, experiences, and/or skills did the applicant share that suggests that they are prepared for a Tufts experience?
- Does the applicant offer meaningful reflection on challenges, leadership roles or other significant experiences in their life?
- What gets the applicant out of bed in the morning? Were interests and passions openly shared? How well were they articulated?
- What struck you the most about the applicant?
- What question would the applicant have asked themselves in an interview? How would they have answered it?

Sample interview reports can be found in the 'Interview Report Samples and Critiques' document found on the TAAP website under Training.

General notes about interview reports:

1. Standardized test scores and grades are judged on a case-by-case basis. The admissions committee will take into account many factors in considering a student's educational background and potential. Please avoid addressing an individual's academic qualifications and chances of admission. If a student or parent presses you for such information, suggest a call to the admissions office (617.627.3170).
2. Interview reports which describe students in physical, racial, religious, sexual or other stereotypic terms, or which mention that a student has a disability (unless the student has discussed it with you), will not assist the committee in reaching an admissions decision. Such comments are inappropriate and, at times, offensive.
3. Please bear in mind that your interview report is not a recommendation for admission, rather it is a report on a conversation. It is appropriate to note "fit" or "match" (i.e. "During our conversation this student's awareness of the importance of global perspective in the classroom was quite apparent"). Please refrain from making comments such as "the student should be denied."
4. Write your report as soon as possible after the interview has concluded to assure accuracy and thoroughness. Please try to write concisely and limit your report to a few paragraphs.
5. Please be mindful of the admissions program the student has applied for (Early Decision round 1 or 2 or Regular Decision) and when these reports are due. EDI reports are due December 1; EDII



reports are due February 1; and Regular Decision reports are due March 1. Prompt return of reports will permit their inclusion in the committee discussions. It is not useful for an interview to be conducted within days of the admissions notification. Each year we receive calls from students or parents who recognize that their interview would not be a factor in their application review because it happened so late in the process.

6. Interview reports must be submitted through *TAAP Online*.

NOTE: When a student enrolls at Tufts, the interview report will be removed from the student's permanent file.