

Marshall Scholarship: Profile of a Scholar

[NB: Criteria is essentially the same for Rhodes and Mitchell Scholarships]

“Marshalls want to change the world.” Thus, when selecting Scholars, regional committees look for:

- “Deep Thinkers” (Reflection)
- Leadership in multiple sectors (Leadership)
- Ability to “get things done” (Action)
- Embracers of challenge; determination (Change Agents)
- Right program/Right reasons (Fit)

In other words, committees look for distinction of intellect and character as evidenced both by scholastic attainments and by other activities and achievements. Preference is given to candidates who combine high academic ability with the capacity to play an active part in the life of the university to which they intend to study as well as to those who display a potential to make a significant contribution to society, and to those who present specific and realistic academic programs of study. In particular, selectors look for the following:

Personal Criteria

- Intellectual and academic distinction
- The potential to become “leaders,” opinion formers and decision makers
- Strong motivation and seriousness of purpose
- Maturity, self-reliance, and self-discipline
- An outward-looking disposition and an interest in society in general—the desire to embrace the challenges of the 21st century with energy & enthusiasm
- Excellent communication skills
- The potential to “make a difference”
- Have a broad range of interests outside their academic field
- Show potential to act as an ambassador for the US and for the UK upon their return to the US—the potential to promote closer British-US understanding

Academic Criteria

- A well-formulated, feasible program of study in line with well thought-out objectives (this may be a taught course of study or may be a course of study involving extensive research)
- Demonstrated relevance for study in the UK
- Demonstrated relevance of program to career or personal goals as articulated in the application
- Potential to become leaders in their chosen discipline/profession

At Interview, Candidates Should Be Able To

- Reveal something of their personality when asked relevant questions (e.g., asking a scientist about a favorite book, poem, film, or most recent performance attended)
- Engage the interview panel in discourse and be able to hold their own in adversarial questioning (i.e., does not merely respond to questions posed, but does speak eloquently and substantively to questions)
- Expand the question and/or the response to wider issues relating to their studies or to the situation in general
- Respond intelligently to searching questions designed to test ability to think out ethical issues
- Demonstrate that they have a social and “intellectual” life outside of academic life (e.g., they are not mere bookworms or loners)

- Demonstrate a sustained commitment to society through volunteer activities and other forms of service
- Demonstrate sincerity, passion, compassion, and commitment
- Demonstrate awareness of current events in general as well as “hot” or popular topics, areas or recent developments within one’s field of study
- Demonstrate an ability to connect ideas—to draw connections even with previous areas of questioning, and to use examples from life-experience, academic studies, current events, etc.
- Demonstrate an assimilation of knowledge, coherence, and an ability to go beyond mere technical or specialized knowledge/training to see how that knowledge relates to the candidate’s view of the world: his/her beliefs, values, politics, ambitions, etc.

Interview Format

- Approximately 30 minutes per candidate (responses should be kept brief, no more than 2-3 minutes per question)
- Typically 6-8 interviewers with a primary questioner (that questioner will have done his/her homework on the candidate’s topic/s) and a secondary questioner;
- Include questions derived from the candidate’s application packet (i.e., his/her essays, resume, and letters of recommendation); these are intensively probing questions that get at the edge of what the candidate does and does not know
- Include questions derived from current events and contemporary topics, developments or debates from the candidate’s general field of expertise
- Include tough as well as soft questions designed to reveal the candidate’s critical thinking and communication skills as well as his/her composure/presence

Feedback from Regional Interview Panels

- The best of those interviewed possessed that rare combination of intellectual brilliance, academic and personal discipline, grace and maturity. They had a clear vision of their futures with well-defined goals, which they explained with clarity, vigor and enthusiasm.
- Unfortunately, approximately 30 - 40% of the finalists tend to fall far short of this standard and of their own potential. Some had no sense of themselves, who they were or where they were going or just could not explain it to us. Others had vague, ill-defined goals coupled with unrealistic, often naïve, plans on how to achieve them. Still others had no interview skills at all. Many would ramble on without answering the questions asked.
- Please remind candidates that the purpose of the interview is to enable the selection committee to probe the finalists’ knowledge of their chosen field; to assess their overall academic and leadership potential; and to determine that they have thought through their proposed program of study in the United Kingdom and are qualified to undertake it. In the interview, the committee also tries to ensure that the finalist has a clear vision of his/her future and a realistic plan to help him/her achieve it. The interviews are conducted in a gracious but highly disciplined fashion to enable us to cover all the necessary ground in the allotted minutes. *Control of the interview must remain with the committee.*

Profile of a Successful Marshall Candidate

By way of illustration, the regional committees offer the following “composite picture” of the achievements of the applicants who routinely make each region’s short list.

Academic Achievements

- Committees carefully scrutinized the academic transcript and resume of every application for depth and breadth of academic interest and accomplishment. All shortlisted candidates are intellectually brilliant with remarkable records of academic achievements and leadership on and off-campus.
- Not surprisingly, most will have won 2 or even 3 highly competitive awards from their university or college and 1 or more competitive national awards. Many have already published articles in peer-reviewed academic journals.

Leadership Record

- All candidates showed remarkable ability on and off campus.
- More importantly, we look for a clear record of creative and innovative leadership that had made a difference. Some candidates demonstrated this by serving as editors or columnists on their college or university newspaper where they provoked serious, informed debate about important issues on or off campus. Others made a decisive impact in their role as elected members of their university or college governing body or student government. (Of course, Service Academy candidates were especially impressive in this category.)

Personal Qualities

- The best of those interviewed possess the rare combination of intellectual brilliance, academic and personal discipline, grace and maturity. They had a clear vision of their futures with well-defined goals and realistic plans to achieve them. And they could articulate them with clarity, vigor and enthusiasm.
- The best also “know” about what is going on in the UK today. They do not possess unrealistic conceptions, outmoded stereotypes, or ill-conceived biases. Their responses to the “Ambassadorial Potential” question on the application as well as in the interview are important here. In the past, the best tied their responses to their long-term goals and program of study. They were also able to handle questions from current events.

Caveat/Special Priorities

All things being equal, the Marshall rules require selection committees to give priority to the selection process to:

- Women
- Minorities
- Scientists
- Candidates in the fine and performing arts
- Disciplines that fall within the Foreign & Commonwealth Office’s strategic foreign policy priorities, including such issues as counter-terrorism, non-proliferation, relations with the Islamic world & Muslim communities, climate change, immigration, organized crime, multilateral organizations, transatlantic relations, EU-US issues

Additionally, Committees are instructed to shortlist a minimum of 3 candidates for interview who have chosen a partnership university as their 1st choice for their 1st year (the scholarship is for 2-3 years) or who have chosen the special 1-year Marshall. HOWEVER, this does NOT mean that the Committee must award a scholarship to such a candidate. Similarly, although candidates who select to study at universities other than Oxford, Cambridge or LSE, while particularly welcome, are not given higher priority over others.