

# Applying for the Rhodes, Marshall, and Gates Cambridge Scholarships

## Spring Semester Before Application

Visit the [Rhodes](#), [Marshall](#), or [Gates Cambridge](#) websites, and download the application forms and instructions. Read all materials carefully. (Application materials are not usually available until the preceding May for Marshall, July for Rhodes, and September for Gates but since the forms change little from year to year you can rely on last year's materials as an initial guide.)

Review your academic and other achievements at Bowdoin, as objectively as possible, to see how well you fit the requirements the fellowships describe. If you meet the requirements for one, you are highly likely to do so for the others; you are strongly recommended to apply for all three. A summary of the instructions for these indicates the similarities. Rhodes applicants are expected to show "proven intellectual and academic quality of a high standard; integrity of character; interest in and respect for their fellow beings; the ability to lead; and the energy to use their talents to the full." Marshall selectors assess candidates for "distinction of intellect and character as evidenced by both their scholastic attainments and by their other activities and achievements; adequate preparation for the proposed course of study, particularly in the upper-level course work and real strength in the major field; a cogent argument as to why their studies and proposed career would be best served by spending two years at a British university; the capacity to play an active part in the life of the United Kingdom university to which they go, and the potential to make a significant contribution to their own society." In selecting Gates Cambridge Scholars, the Trust looks for "students of exceptional academic achievement and scholarly promise for whom advanced study at Cambridge would be particularly appropriate. The Trust expects a good match to be made between the applicant's qualifications and aspirations and what Cambridge has to offer. Successful applicants will have the ability to make a significant contribution to their discipline while in Cambridge, with a strong aptitude for research, analysis and a creative approach to defining and solving problems."

Discuss the possibility of applying for these scholarships with faculty advisors, especially if they work in the academic area that you would like to pursue in the UK.

Be sure that you have a clear sense of your academic purpose in applying for a scholarship, and develop a short list of the programs and universities that are best suited to your academic background and needs. Review the degree programs available at the Oxford University website ([www.ox.ac.uk](http://www.ox.ac.uk)), the University of Cambridge website, and the searchable database of programs and institutions available at the British Council website ([www.studyintheuk.org](http://www.studyintheuk.org)). Stephen Hall has a small number of printed university prospectuses that you can review in the Off-Campus Study Office. Other references are provided in the Marshall "Memorandum of Guidance to Candidates." Marshall applicants are urged not to ignore the many excellent British universities outside Oxford, Cambridge, and London. (You should also not give the impression that you are applying for a Marshall merely as a backup for the Rhodes.)

Arrange to discuss your application with the Director of Student Fellowships and Research before you leave campus for the summer.

When applying for the Rhodes and/or Marshall, decide from which state you will apply. For either scholarship, you may apply from your home state or from Maine. It will generally help you secure a first interview if you apply from Maine.

Decide which of your advisors you will ask to write a letter of recommendation on your behalf, and, if they are willing to do so, send them the form and instructions as soon as it is available. Complete and sign any parts of the form that are your responsibility. You will need not fewer than five and no more than eight letters of reference for the Rhodes, at least four of which are from your undergraduate instructors, and four letters for the Marshall, one of which is from a "preferred recommender." The Gates Cambridge requires one referee who can write knowledgeably about you as a person, and who can comment authoritatively on your non-academic attributes and achievements. Give your advisors plenty of notice; give them a copy of the scholarships' instructions to recommenders and a full explanation of your plans (a copy of your resume and draft application essay is the easiest way to do this); and make sure that they know where and by when to send the letter (the scholarships differ in their requirements in this area). For a major scholarship, you will need a letter that demonstrates a close acquaintance with you and your work, and addresses your qualifications for the specific scholarship and degree to which you are applying. Let the Bowdoin Office of Student Fellowships and Research know exactly which letters will be sent directly to the Rhodes or Marshall scholarship office (with multiple copies), and which to the Office of Student Fellowships and Research. In any case, ask if your recommender would be willing to send a reference copy to the Office of Student Fellowships and Research.

It is also a very good idea to ask an advisor who is familiar with your proposed field of study if he or she would be willing to review your application essay.

### **Summer Vacation Before Application**

Start work on your application essays. While these essays should obviously be extremely carefully composed, they should be, as the Rhodes instructions put it, "written in as clear and direct a style as possible." Do not aim to dazzle the reader with a literary or intellectual tour de force; and avoid the model of the college application essay that focuses on a formative experience in your life. Rhodes asks for a 1000-word description of your academic and other interests, the specific area of proposed study, and your reasons for wishing to study at Oxford; Marshall asks for a 1000-word description of your academic and other interests and pursuits, and the Gates requires a 500-word description of how your interests and achievements - both academic and extra-curricular - demonstrate a capacity for leadership plus a commitment to using your knowledge to serve your community and to applying your talents to improve the lives of others. You also must explain how your proposed studies in Cambridge will help you with the aims of your future career.

Start simply, and the connections between your various interests and goals should emerge naturally. Read the instructions extremely carefully, and in particular observe the following:

- Do not exceed the word limit. Watch for repetition and wordy expressions.
- The structure and logic of your essay should be absolutely clear.
- Try to convey the significance of your work to an intelligent and well-informed, but non-specialist reader; be thought-provoking, but not too technical.
- Remember that both scholarships give you another part of the application in which to outline your activities, awards, etc.; you do not have to cram everything into the essay.
- Your writing must be grammatically and typographically impeccable.
- Pay close attention to other requirements on format, typeface, etc.

Over the summer, you should send a dated draft or two of your essays and of your resume to the Director of Student Fellowships and Research, and to any of your advisors who have agreed to give you comments (email is the most convenient method). It is hard for your

readers to help you if your drafts arrive in sections, or change almost daily, so do not send them anything until you have a first version that is reasonably complete; but it is time to ask for advice if you find that you are stuck, or cannot leave the draft alone. You will very quickly get too close to your own essay, and overlook gaps in the logic and structure that will seem very obvious to your readers. Take their comments seriously, and fix the problems that they point out — you may lose their sympathy if they see the same ones in your next draft! Remember, finally, that the essay has to be your own work (for the Rhodes you even have to conclude the essay with a signed statement to this effect); your readers will be happy to make editorial suggestions, but you are responsible for the essay's ideas and arguments, and for its final state. Try to do as much as you can over the summer; once the Bowdoin semester starts you will find you have very little time to do much serious rewriting. It is very disappointing to see promising applications abandoned, after much hard work, for the lack of time to apply the essential finishing touches.

Make sure you are ready to assemble all the other components of your application, such as photographs, photocopies of birth certificates, transcripts, etc.

### **Fall Semester**

As soon as you return to campus, get in touch with the Director of Student Fellowships and Research to review your application. By early September your essays and resume should be essentially complete, and ready for distribution to the members of the Fellowship Committee. An on-campus interview (of about 30 minutes) will be scheduled for you with the committee around 15 September. On the basis of that interview and of your essay, the committee will decide whether your application will receive Bowdoin's endorsement.

If you or the members of the Fellowship Committee feel that you need more interview practice, one or more mock interviews may be scheduled for you through the Office of Student Fellowships and Research.

If your application receives Bowdoin's endorsement, put the final touches to your essay and finish assembling your application packet. Give a copy of the institutional endorsement form, with the necessary addresses and signature, etc., to the Director of Student Fellowships and Research; include an additional copy of your application, to assist in the writing of the letter.

You will hear if you have been invited to an interview a few weeks after the application deadline. Your interview will probably last about 30 minutes. The interviewers may be a mix of academics, previous winners, and others in positions of public service. Most Bowdoin candidates report that they were pressed hard by their interviewers, if not aggressively. You will be expected to show your intelligence and commitment by being quick on your feet, and by speaking clearly, persuasively, engagingly, and, not least, reasonably concisely. While anticipating questions is a very inexact science, you should plan to answer any question or defend any position that has a connection with anything you say in your essay; such a connection may well be rather indirect, as you are unlikely to have the fortune (good or ill) to meet up with an expert in your proposed academic field. If you are lobbed a soft question, such as "Why Cambridge?" make sure that you do not shrug it off with a casual response. In general, however, admit the limitations of your knowledge rather than try to disguise them with lengthy waffling. You may well be asked about questions of public policy that do or do not arise from your essay; be sure to be well informed in any case about current affairs, especially as it pertains to US-UK relations. You may avoid straying into dangerous political territory, or sounding arrogant, if you make clear, without being too diffident, that you understand the pros and cons of the positions you hold. While you will not be expected to have a profound understanding of the educational system in the UK, and

your proposed university and program, you should have done your basic homework on the subject.

Interview candidates for the Rhodes also attend a reception the evening before the interview, at which they meet other candidates as well as committee members. While this reception is by no means as important as the interview itself, it is also not just a social occasion; you may find that one member of the committee is taking a particular interest in you, and probing for a possible first line of questioning the next day!

Scholarships are announced shortly after the interview.