

LIFE OF YAZ

ME, MYSELF AND I, AND ALSO ALL THE RANDOM THINGS THAT I MIGHT HAVE DONE WITH MY LIFE.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 01, 2007

My Cambridge Interview Experience

Okay, as promised, I think I'll share a bit about my experience in having an interview in Cambridge. Unlike a lot of other universities that only have 'interviews' as in 'we just want to see your face and have a chat' session, in Cambridge you'll need to expect a proper, serious interview. Only then will they decide on giving you an offer. Or not. Before I start, I just need to say that this is just my recount of my own interview, so it should by no means be treated as 'a definitive guide to Cambridge interviews' or something like that, since there are different types of interviews and I only know about my own. To clarify, I applied to Cambridge to do Chemical Engineering.

It started when I looked at the Cambridge prospectus to prepare for the application process. To tell the truth, with so many colleges being featured in there and they all seem pretty similar, the prospectus confused me a bit. Of course, at that time I knew nothing about the different colleges, which one is richer, bigger, more famous etc. etc. In the end, I just decided to choose a college that has the type of interview that I like: Trinity.

Pretty funny that even without prior knowledge, I end up in one of the richer, bigger and more famous of the lot.

Depending on the subject, some colleges have a normal interview, an interview with Thinking Skills Assessment or TSA (sort of like an IQ test in a way), or an interview with a technical test. I realised that my people and social skills are probably mediocre, average at best, so I ignored the normal interviews. My mock TSA test (they have a model of the test online) is around 60-ish %, not bad but definitely not outstanding so I ignored those too. That left me with the interview-with-test type, which is okay for me since I'm definitely comfortable with the technical test compared with just an oral interview. At least now I have something to fall back on when I screw up in the oral interviews by either:

a) failing to be eloquent and charming *or*

b) spewing complete crap when asked questions like 'What can you contribute to Cambridge?', 'What are your strong points?' and 'Why do you think you want to study in Cambridge?' *or*

ABOUT ME



YAZID JAY

Was an MCKK and Atlantic College student back in the days... Am currently trying to figure out what to do with this thing they call a degree from Cambridge.

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c) (and this is what most people dread about Cambridge interviews) being utterly gobsmacked and speechless when asked questions like 'What do you think about extra-terrestrials?' or 'If you could make up a word, what would it be?' or some other bizarre questions of that nature.

So among the interview-with-test type colleges, I picked Trinity at random. My application was accepted and they asked me to go to Cambridge (since I was in the UK at the time) for my interview. That was in December 2004.

So I went there, stayed the night, and did the test the next day. It was a combination of physics, chemistry/material science and maths. The thing to remember here is that if you find the test hard, then you shouldn't worry about it. They purposely made it so that you won't be able to answer everything, and that's for a reason which will be apparent later.

Some time after the test, I walked to the place where my dreaded oral interview is going to be held. I went in. There were two people: a woman who dyed her hair red and another blonde woman (I don't know who the first person is but the second one is my current Head of Department and Director of Studies). I sat on the chair, and the interview began.

The good thing: they don't ask me some mind boggling questions that you have to bullsh*t your way through i.e. situation (b) or (c). I think you can still get those kinds of questions though, even in an engineering course interview so it's wise to be prepared anyway. The bad thing: lo and behold, they have the test answers that I wrote with them! So here's the reason they make the test difficult: they go through your answers, and they note which questions you have difficulty with, and they ask you about them in the oral interview. Personally I think it's kinda cruel. The purpose of this is so that by presenting a problem that you don't know and giving you hints during the interview to guide you to the answer, they can see your thought process i.e. how you think to solve the problem. One of the questions that I couldn't answer is about unit cells, which honestly is not in the IB syllabus and the only time I've encountered them was when I read Chemistry 9th edition by Prentice Hall. They have this crystal lattice model in front of me to demonstrate the unit cell and I swear I can feel the gears in my brain grinding as I try to work out the answer. Fortunately, I managed to solve it, and I think they were impressed. So am I, if truth be told.

There was a question which leads you to estimating the density of air. It began with 'The weight of air in this room is about the same as half a dozen eggs...' or something like that. Normally this is a killer question for me since I am horrendous at estimating things. I can't guess the distance/weight/height of things without actually measuring it. However, I was proud of the answer that I gave: I basically ignored the question and wrote 'Well, in the data book that I've read, the density of

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air to three s.f. is...' and I put down the value. I think the interviewers had a laugh from it. Just to clarify things, no, I don't go around memorising values in the data book. That would be stupid. I just did a number of physics questions some months before and since I had to look up the value a few times, it sort of sticks in my head. So I guess I'm just lucky.

Well, that's the short (or long) of it. Hope I didn't bore you. I got an offer afterwards asking for a 42 and 7,7,7 in higher subject. For those of you who are/were doing the IB, you'll realise that this is a very cruel offer. Still, they're Cambridge, so I guess they can afford to do that. So, the lesson? The interview's just halfway. You still have to work hard afterwards to meet the offer.

That about sums it up, then. I usually stay in Cambridge in December so sometimes when I see the current interview candidates, some relaxed, and some nervous, unsure, waiting in anticipation... I can't help smiling and be reminded of the time when I've been through what they'll undoubtedly be going through. Can't help but wish them all the best either, since I know how challenging it can be. Good luck!

Yaz.

POSTED BY YAZID JAY AT 8:22 PM

14 COMMENTS:

bob said...

cool

11:33 PM, AUGUST 30, 2008

Anonymous said...

www.cantabrigian.co.uk

11:33 PM, AUGUST 30, 2008

Anonymous said...

kewl stuff!

11:01 AM, OCTOBER 21, 2008

madeline said...

I'm having my interview on decemeber the 8th (next monday...) and I just wanted to thank you for your "testimony". Although you clearly stated that it's not to be considered as the overall cambridge interview model, it still helped to hear it (at least on my part).

Bonne continuation, as we would say in french ^^