

Rhodes Scholarships

www.rhodesscholar.org

Deadline: national deadline: October 1, 2008; preliminary campus deadline: September 16, 2008

Fields of Study

Any subject taught at Oxford University.

Description

Rhodes Scholarships are awarded for a period of study at Oxford University. The scholarship pays all tuition fees in addition to a maintenance stipend. The Rhodes scholarship is normally for two years but the scholarship may be held from one to three years, depending on the degree program pursued by the scholar. The scholarship may be held for three years for students who pursue a doctoral degree. For information about courses of study, refer to the Oxford Graduate and Undergraduate Prospectuses.

For the U.S. competition, a candidate must be a U.S. citizen, between the ages of 18 and 24 on October 1 of the year of application, and have received a bachelor's degree before commencing study at Oxford. The 32 Rhodes scholarships awarded each year to U.S. citizens are distributed according to a system of 16 geographical districts. Rhodes scholarships are available to citizens of 20 countries besides the U.S. in separate competitions. At present, several constituencies regard their citizens who study at universities in the U.S. as eligible to apply for their own competition. Citizens of Canada, Bermuda, Jamaica, the Commonwealth Caribbean, Kenya, Singapore, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are eligible to apply to the Rhodes competitions for these countries on the basis of degrees from American universities.

Criteria for Selection

Selection criteria are proven intellectual and academic achievement, integrity of character, interest in and respect for others, the ability to lead, and the energy to use their talents to the full. These criteria were established by the Will of Cecil Rhodes, the founder of the scholarships, which specified the following four standards:

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.

Underlying these standards is the aim that Scholars be physically, intellectually and morally capable of leadership. Cecil Rhodes hoped that scholars would "esteem the performance of public duties as [their] highest aim." The Rhodes Trust hopes that scholars will play an influential part in the betterment of society, wherever their careers might take them.

The criteria are interpreted broadly. Academic attainment of a very high standard is essential but not sufficient. Rhodes wanted scholars who were not “mere bookworms” but combined intellectual talents with a concern for others. While it was once the case that most Rhodes Scholars were athletes, the second standard is now interpreted as the vigor that will enable someone to make an effective contribution to the world around them. The third criterion is intangible, but they are looking for a rooted passion and commitment. The fourth item is demonstrated by taking an interest in others and does not presuppose an interest in politics as a career. Not all strong candidates are “campus politicians” or “student leaders,” though some are. Work in theoretical physics could be an example of “fighting the world’s fight,” another of Rhodes’ aspirations for Rhodes Scholars.

The durable yet outmoded stereotype of the Rhodes Scholar as student-athlete-politician presents the obstacle that potential strong candidates who do not consider themselves the “Rhodes type” may not apply for the scholarship. The variety of winners in recent years suggests that there is no uniform “Rhodes type.”

The standard of academic achievement expected is higher than the older stereotype. A memorandum from the Rhodes Trust recently stated: “While we continue to select Scholars based on all the criteria in Mr. Rhodes’ Will—seeking well-rounded excellence—candidates must, obviously, be extremely able academically. Unless they would likely be admitted to one of the handful of most selective graduate schools in the United States in their area of primary interest, they are not likely to be successful as Rhodes Scholars at Oxford. Of course, we look for far more than such intellectual distinction, but it remains the essential prerequisite.”

Application Procedure

The nomination process involves submission of the application materials and letters of recommendation to one of sixteen regional committees of selection. Rhodes Scholars apply as representatives of their state—either the state of residence or the state of university education. In recent years, Rhodes Scholars have been selected in a single-stage process in which the 50 states are organized to create 16 districts, each with approximately the same size applicant pool. A few districts consist of a single state (New York or California), some have as many as six states, and most consist of two or three states. (District I includes Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont; District II is Massachusetts and New Jersey; District III is New York; District IV is Pennsylvania and Delaware, and so on.) Each of the 16 regions will name two Rhodes Scholars. Since the number of applicants in each region is about 65, the odds of being invited to an interview do not vary substantially from one region to another.

Applicants must have from 5 to 8 letters of recommendation (at least four must be from faculty who have taught them) sent to the district committee by the deadline. These must be very strong letters of recommendation that should show the full breadth of interests of the applicant.

2008 Campus deadline: Applicants for the Rhodes Scholarship must be endorsed by WPI. In early September, each applicant should submit a *draft* personal statement, list of activities, and the names and email addresses of at least five references (including four faculty) to Prof. Peter Hansen, the WPI Rhodes representative. The WPI deadline for complete applications to be considered for institutional nomination is **September 16, 2008**. The applicant will revise their

application materials before the end of September in order to meet the national deadline at the beginning of October.

Applicants mail one original plus nine copies of the following to the appropriate district committee before the national deadline: an application cover sheet, a transcript, a two-page list of activities and awards, and a 1,000-word essay. Applicants also submit 10 copies of a head and shoulders photograph and a photocopy of a birth certificate or passport or other proof of age and citizenship. An online application process may be implemented in the future. Check the Rhodes website.

Each district committee of selection will invite approximately 12-16 candidates for interviews which may begin on a Friday and continue until decisions are reached on Saturday. The selection process includes receptions and may include multiple interviews. The two Rhodes Scholars in each region will be announced immediately after these interviews. (In 2007, these interviews were November 16 and 17). After selection, the Rhodes Trust uses the applications, and additional material from the Scholars-elect, to arrange for admission to an academic program and residential college at Oxford. They are not confirmed as scholars until admitted to Oxford University and one of its colleges.

Additional Information

Rhodes Scholars may pursue a graduate program (masters or doctorate) or a second bachelor's degree at Oxford. However, the second B.A. degree is no longer the best choice for most Rhodes Scholars. Most applicants find an M.Phil. or M.Sc.—or an M.St., M.Litt. or D.Phil.—a better match if they plan to continue in their area of primary academic interest while at Oxford. The application should focus on the academic program proposed for the first year.

Most Rhodes Scholars now apply initially for a one- or two-year master's degree program. It is permissible to apply for a one-year degree or diploma only. Among the popular one-year degrees, the Rhodes Trust has mentioned the M.Sc. programs in Environmental Change and Management, Human Geography, Forced Migration, Economics and Development, Comparative Social Policy, Medical Anthropology, and Global Health Science (public health). An applicant may also propose a two-year plan of study at Oxford which could include a two-year M.Phil. or a two-year M.Sc. by Research. Applicants may not propose an MBA at any time.

Applicants may propose completion of a doctorate, and should indicate this preference in their application. Since direct admission to doctoral programs in the UK generally requires beginning dissertation research earlier than in the U.S., students proposing a doctorate should investigate specific degree requirements, as some programs may begin with registration as Probationary Research Student Status and others might recommend initial registration for a master's degree. Rhodes Scholars may apply to receive funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to fund completion of doctoral research jointly funded by the NIH and Oxford as part of the NIH Graduate Partnerships Program. Scholars also may apply to the Rhodes Trust to receive funding for a D.Phil. after a one-year masters in the same field or a two-year degree (MPhil or M.Sc.) as long as the doctorate may be completed within three years of matriculation.

For the second B.A., a student normally completes the final two years of a three-year undergraduate program. Since the Oxford BA converts to an MA after a few years, this was once seen as similar to doing a master's degree in the U.S. Some B.A. programs remain good for a student seeking a "broadening" experience outside his or her undergraduate major. However, the percentage of Rhodes Scholars who propose a second bachelor's degree has declined steadily in recent years.

How important are sports? People think this is more important than it is. The selectors are looking for vigor, which could be expressed in many ways. If a student is truly an exceptional athlete, it is a plus. Most recent Rhodes Scholars are no more than intramural athletes. Rhodes Scholars have been selected with significant physical disabilities (blind or deaf or cerebral palsy or other chronic disease), and no one could question their vigor.

How important are grades? There is no minimum GPA, but the average GPA of recent Rhodes Scholars is very high (about 3.9). *However*, the American Secretary of the Rhodes Trust finds such averages "of little value, since it might suggest many students to be much stronger than they really are and an equal number the reverse. Some of our best Rhodes Scholars have had 'low' GPAs. Given the primacy we place on personal interviews, the GPA usually shrinks entirely from relevance at that stage—but it undeniably will have an effect, with many other things of course, on short list decisions."

The Rhodes Trust views the Scholarship as an investment in individuals. It is not a reward for past performance or an assessment of the merits of a research proposal. The personal statement should focus on the student's background and interests and relate them to a specific program of study that they propose at Oxford.

The Rhodes Trust was established by the bequest of Cecil Rhodes, an empire builder of the nineteenth century, who made his fortune in the diamond and gold mines of southern Africa. During 2003, the centenary of the scholarships, the Rhodes Trust and the Mandela Foundation of South Africa created a new partnership, the Mandela-Rhodes Trust, to invest in human capacity building in Africa and to "close the circle" linking Rhodes with Africans, the people who created the wealth which made possible the scholarships.

Former Rhodes Scholars have included former President Bill Clinton; US Supreme Court Justice David Souter; songwriter and actor Kris Kristofferson; astronomer Edwin Hubble; and former NATO Supreme Commander Gen. Wesley Clark; among professors, scientists, politicians, journalists and many in other professions.

A variety of websites offer additional information on Oxford or the Rhodes Scholarship:

- Rhodes Scholarships: www.rhodesscholar.org official site. Read this thoroughly. The section on Frequently Asked Questions is updated annually, and includes sections on Oxford, the application process, and "what are my chances?"
- Oxford Graduate Studies Prospectus: www.admin.ox.ac.uk/gsp
- Oxford Undergraduate Prospectus: www.admissions.ox.ac.uk/prospectus

- Study in Britain resources: www.wpi.edu/Academics/FS/britainstudy.html

Previous Rhodes Scholars from WPI:

1929: Richard K. Irons '27

1946: Peter Briggs Myers '46