

Sample Interview Questions

The following are interview questions Ford School students have been asked during campus, phone and on-site interviews in recent years. While some questions may not be specific to your policy area, similar types of questions may be asked in a variety of interest areas.

To best use these sample questions, do not just say, “Ok, I know how I will answer that!” Answer the question aloud or in writing. Practice putting complete, articulate sentences together as opposed to just thoughts or examples you “plan” to use. There is a difference between knowing what you want to say and preparing your intelligent, articulate and concise response. Use specific examples from your experience that demonstrate the point you are making. Practice and be prepared.

General Interview Questions:

- Walk me through your resume. What led you to policy school? Why Michigan?
- What skills have you learned at the Ford School and how can you apply those skills here?
- What is the most important thing you have learned from a specific class or specific work experience?
- What is your preferred working style? How do you learn best?
- What is your ideal work environment? What “ruffles your feathers?”
- Why do you want to work here? What would you expect to find the most satisfying about this job? What would you expect to be the most challenging?
- Why should we hire you?
- How do you set your priorities?
- How do you deal with conflict?
- How do you approach a problem or solve a problem? What would your classmates and supervisors say are your greatest strengths/areas for improvement?
- What do you think are the skills or qualities we want for applicants of this position?
- As a graduate student, you have written numerous papers/memos. What is your greatest challenge in writing?
- Would you be able to handle a fast-turn-around, high-pressure work environment?
- How would you evaluate the Ford School? What criteria would you use and how would you measure it?
- Given that you do not have much experience with quantitative analysis on a *professional* level, why do you think you can do this job?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- Do you have any questions?

Behavioral Interview Question:

- Tell me about a problem you had to solve or an obstacle you had to overcome in your work experience or in your course work. How did you go about it? In retrospect, what would you have done differently?
- Core competencies of our organization are achieving results, thinking critically, presenting information, and working with others. Give examples of your abilities/skills in these areas.
- Talk about a time when you may have worked on a project and your supervisor failed to provide much direction for the project. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time you had to speak in public. How did you prepare for the presentation?
- Tell me about a group project where one of the group members was difficult to work with or did not pull his/her weight. How did you handle this?
- Tell me about a time when you led a team successfully/unsuccessfully.
- Tell me about a time you worked with a large data set. What was the project? What were the greatest challenges?
- Tell me about a time when your integrity or personal ethics were challenged. What was the experience; how did you handle it? What, if anything, might you have done differently?
- Describe a project you worked on where you used econometrics or your quantitative skills.
- Talk about your experiences working with community members.
- Describe a situation in which you recognized a problem as a potential opportunity. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn?
- What type of experience have you had evaluating policy?
- Give an example of a challenge you faced at work. What did you do to solve it?

Policy and Skill Specific Interview Questions:

- Interpret this graph for me. (Assume recruiter has handed you a graph relevant to his/her work.)
- How did you go about researching the writing sample paper you wrote? What steps did you take? What sources did you use?
- What is the relationship between correlation coefficient and r^2 ?
- At your previous employer, why should funding on your program be continued? What might be a better way to evaluate the success of that program? Where were the weaknesses in the project?
- Talk about your quantitative abilities with time series data.
- As an environmentalist, you might be called to lobby for something that is not in line with your personal ideals. How would you handle that situation? What would you do? Give me an example of time when you were in that situation. How did you handle that?

- What areas of community development interest you most?
- What are some of the policy issues you have dealt with generally? Which have you have analyzed?
- What do you think are the biggest issues that impede progress in (insert policy area) reform?
- Most of our researchers end up choosing either a qualitative or a quantitative approach to research. At the beginning of your work here you might do both, but which actually is your research preference - qualitative or quantitative?
- Based on your resume, I see you have done a lot of work in politics. This organization is valued because of the nonpartisan approach our work. Convince me you can fit here.
- Based on your resume I see you have done a lot of advocacy work. How would you feel about the revenue generating/profit maximization focus of our economic work? Would you be uncomfortable with the revenue generating side of economic development?
- You have been asked to propose spending USAID money on creating democracy in Cambodia. Create a program there for us. What is your spending plan?
- Pick a state. Tell me the five most important policy problems in that state. Now pick one of those issues - what is the nature of the problem? What could be done about it? What information would you need to gather?
- What do you think of the healthcare reform bill?
- How would you design a benefit cost analysis of welfare-to-work program?
- Do you have any impact assessment experience?

Personal Attribute Interview Questions:

- Are you currently applying and looking at other opportunities?
- How are you different from every other MPP who has applied?
- What are you least excited about doing in this position? How would you tackle the tasks that you do not enjoy doing?
- If you were giving your new colleagues a “user’s manual” to use to accelerate their “getting to know you” process, what would you include in it?
- In what ways will this role help you stretch your professional capabilities?
- Do you think you can cut through the bureaucracy?
- If you were a product on a shelf, what product would you be? Why?
- How important is feedback to you? How often do you like to receive it? What was the toughest feedback you have ever received and how did you learn from it?
- In five years, you are standing on a stage receiving an award. Who is your audience? What award are you receiving?