



# Preparing for Placement Week & Beyond

Updated October 2020



# Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Overview                                      | 3  |
| Advice for a Successful Interview             | 4  |
| Interview/Workplace Attire                    | 6  |
| Interview Scheduling                          | 8  |
| Host Office Interview: Key Topics & Questions | 9  |
| Informal Conversations: Do's & Dont's         | 11 |
| Ranking Tips & Tricks                         | 13 |

*The following information has been gathered from past and current Knauss fellows. New suggestions are always welcome to keep content complete and current.*



## Placement Week

This document serves as a guide for how to approach placement week including interacting with potential hosts, interview questions and tips, as well as general advice. It was compiled by the 2020 Knauss cohort after surveying our own class on placement week topics and drawing on our placement week experiences. Not all topics may be relevant to you or your class, but you can use whichever parts are most helpful to you. Our hope is that the unique perspective of past fellows will be helpful in your preparation for placement week and the Knauss fellowship year. If this document does not answer all of your questions, remember that our cohort as well as many past are always willing to act as a supportive network and answer any questions you have.

One piece of advice to start out with, is to remember that you and your Knauss cohort are going through this together! Start a group Slack or Facebook page to build a sense of community early on and support each other throughout the week (and upcoming year). Best of luck!



# Advice for a Successful Interview

This section summarizes advice from the 2020 Knauss cohort in response to the following question:

**“For placement week, were there any tips/tricks you wish to share about having a successful interview with host offices?”**

# Questions

Descriptions

Breathe

Notes

Interview

**Bring Questions:** 43% of survey respondents suggested bringing questions to the interview. In many cases, this will be your first opportunity to learn more about the position and if it fits your needs or interests.

**Take Notes:** 30% of survey respondents suggested taking notes during the host office presentations and during interviews. These can be helpful for ensuring you remember what you liked or disliked about each position.

**Be yourself:** 26% of survey respondents recommended being yourself! Offices are excited to meet prospective fellows. Let them see the ‘real you’ during the interview.

**Read the Office Description:** 26% of survey respondents suggested bringing copies of the office descriptions to the interview with your notes, and read them ahead of time to remember what about the position interested you.

**Just Breathe:** 22% of survey respondents suggested taking more time to breathe and reflect during Placement Week. Keep in mind that you are already a finalist, and you WILL get a host office match!

**Interview Outside of the Box:** 9% of survey respondents suggested interviewing with offices that are outside of your regular research realm. This can be a great opportunity to expand your experience.

# Advice for a Successful Interview

**The following recommendations have also been suggested regarding selecting and preparing for Placement week interviews:**

- Take notes during the host office presentations. These will help you align your interests with the job description, and remind you what about that office initially intrigued you.
- As you take notes, we recommend you also list questions for each office you plan to speak to. Although each interview may be structured differently, most offices will allow you to ask questions after describing the position.
- The past cohort also recommended keeping copies of the position description on hand, and to re-read them before each interview. Some offices may reference the description and ask what about the portfolio you are most interested in. Look into two-way interviews to be prepared.
- Give genuine responses to questions. Host offices will be more interested in how you overcame a challenge or are working on a current goal than a generic answer to your most common weakness.

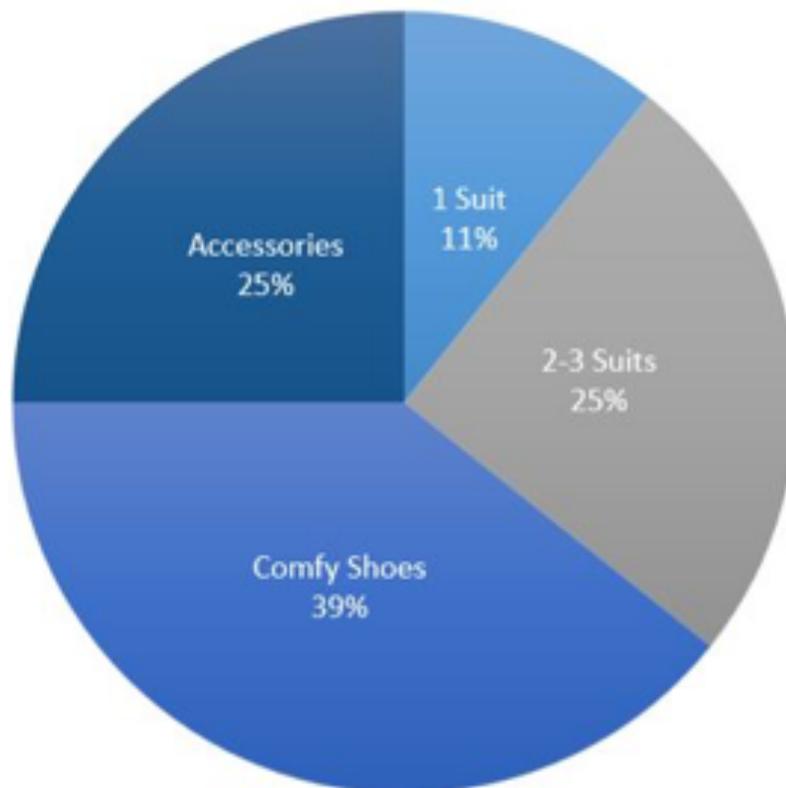


# Interview/Workplace Attire

This section summarizes advice from the 2020 Knauss cohort in response to the following question:

**“For interview attire, what did you find effective that could be useful for future fellows? Please also consider any tips regarding the number of outfits, shoes, transit, gender considerations, etc.”**

For interview attire, what did you find most effective?



# Interview/Workplace Attire

## In Person Interviews

Based on the results from the survey, most fellows suggested bringing 2-3 suits or a mixture of blazers, dress slacks, skirts, and dresses. Many fellows recommended mixing and matching, starting with suits and bringing tops, ties, and accessories that can pair in different combinations. Fellows strongly recommended wearing more comfortable shoes (flats, oxfords, chelsea boots) over heels or other fancy dress shoes. Whatever you wear, we recommend a secondary pair of shoes to switch into while trekking between interviews (many people packed running shoes). Regardless, we recommend breaking your shoes in beforehand! Please be aware that most offices have metal detectors which will require you to remove larger jewelry, heels (there are metal rods in most styles) and belts in some cases. Other recommendations included packing an umbrella or rain poncho, band-aids for your heels, a lint roller, deoderant, stain-remover, a briefcase, backpack, or waterproof bag to carry essentials (interview notes, snacks, water) and a padfolio to neatly store all of your notes.

## Remote Interviews

For remote interviews, it is recommended that finalists dress as professionally as they would an in-person interview, though you can probably get by with fewer outfits. Online, your professional presentation includes considering what will be visible in your background during the meeting. When possible, try to ensure you will not be interrupted during the interview, and clear out any distracting or unprofessional items. Be sure to test your video, audio, and internet connection prior to the meeting. Ideally, use a set of headphones for clearer audio connection and to avoid echo. Make sure your face is well-lit by having overhead lighting in front of you (or natural light). Additionally, fully engage and make eye contact during the interview just as you would in-person. Try to reduce at-home distractions, such as focusing too heavily on your notes, or multitasking (such as by searching things on the web).

## All Interviews

Remember, once you have your placement dress code varies between offices. Some require suits/blazers often, while others have more casual professional dress. Think about the flexibility of any new purchases you make for interviews, and consider taking advantage of sales and thrift stores.

Last but not least, be yourself! Even when “dressing the part,” show up as your full self in these interviews. Feel free to express your personality (professionally) through your attire if that is meaningful to you. A fun tie, some personal accessories, and pops of color can be great conversation starters, help you stand out from other applicants, and even a way to find you at happy hours.

# Interview Scheduling

This section summarizes advice from the 2020 Knauss cohort in response to the following question:

“Do you have any advice for how you scheduled your interviews?”

# Interview

## Breaks

Pace

# Order

# Geography

**Geography:** 43% of survey participants recommended ordering interviews based on office location.

**Interview Order:** 47% of survey participants recommended starting each day with ‘warm up interviews’ that may not have been their top choice.

**Take Breaks:** 27% of survey participants recommended taking more breaks between interviews

**Meals:** 16% of survey participants recommended setting more time aside for meals between interviews.

**Pace Yourself:** 7% of survey participants recommended pacing yourself and scheduling top interviews during your best hours of productivity.

One last guiding piece of advice from the current cohort:

**“Sign up for interviews to learn more about positions that are interesting to you. Don’t feel you have to be the most qualified to take an interview with an office”.**

# Host Office Interview: Key Topics & Questions

The 2020 Knauss cohort recommends that finalists discuss the following topics during interviews with prospective host offices and mentors, and consider some of the following questions to learn more about what a fellowship year in a particular office might be like.

There are more questions here than you can ask in one interview or happy hour. Before the interviews, consider the things that are most important to you (i.e. international travel, time to complete your degree, work-life balance, projects, etc) and be sure to get clear answers on those areas. If there is something in particular that you want to or need to devote time to during the year, be upfront about this and ask if it can be incorporated into your fellowship plan.

## Topic 1: Roles and responsibilities

- What will my main responsibilities be in this office?
- What will my day to day tasks look like?
- Who will I report to and who will be my office "mentor"? In addition to the mentor, who else will be working with on a regular basis?
- What support networks do you have in place for your fellow?
- Will fellowship work be project-based, including long-term efforts, or will it change on a daily basis?
- If the work is project-based, what projects will the fellow be working on throughout the year? Do you anticipate that the fellow will focus on one project or will the fellow be a part of several ongoing efforts? What are examples of projects that past fellows have completed in the office?
- Do you anticipate any products or deliverables that the fellow could take ownership of?
- What opportunities do you anticipate for the fellow to build leadership skills?
- What are the top skills you are looking for in this position?

## Topic 2: Long-term planning and vision

- What are the short term and long term goals for this position? What are examples of major milestones that one can expect to aim for when in this position (e.g. one or two major meetings/events that you're working for? finishing a report? holding x number of briefings? etc.)?
- How do you envision success at the end of the fellowship year? How will the fellow know that they are succeeding in the position?
- What are the biggest challenges that you expect for this project/position?
- What exposure will this position have with other offices/agencies or the hill throughout the year?
- What skills or experiences can I expect to have gained at the end of the fellowship?

# Host Office Interview: Key Topics & Questions

- Will the fellow be able to pick up some projects of particular interest to them or is the long-term plan fairly established?
- What kinds of professional development opportunities does the office support? Will there be time to do professional development activities like finishing graduate work, or attending training?
- Will the fellow be expected to travel?
- How many fellows has your office hosted before and where are they now?

## Topic 3: Office Schedule and Engagement

- Do you have any expectations regarding work hours, schedules, and fellowship/office travel?
- What does a typical day look like? What the office does may sound exciting, but how that comes about may not be your cup of tea.
- What percentage of time/effort are office members engaged in individual-based work vs. teamwork?
- What is your office's expectation of work-life balance? Can you describe the office culture?
- Do office members work remotely or in person?
- What resources does the office provide to the fellow (laptop, phone, travel covered, office)?
- What's the next year in your office going to look like? What major events are you organizing or participating in for the fellowship year?

## Topic 4: Mentorship

- Can you describe your mentorship style? Management style? How often do you see us meeting?
- Why are you interested in hosting a fellow?
- What is your communication style and how available will you be to the fellow?
- How supportive are you of the fellow taking time to *[insert specific activity that is important to you here]* during the fellowship year?

## Topic 5: Deeper insights

- What part of your job brings you the most joy? What projects are you most excited about? What are the projects/focuses/efforts are you most proud of in the past year?
- Describe a good day and bad day in the office. What's most fulfilling about the work?
- What is the work/life balance like for you?
- What is the most challenging aspect of the job/position being offered (or about your job)?
- What strategies, in your experience, work well for helping fellows transition from academia to policy/government work?
- If there is a current fellow in the office: What surprised the current fellow about the position? What did the current fellow find to be the most challenging aspect of the experience, and what is he/she most proud of accomplishing?

# Informal Conversations/Happy Hours

In addition to the formal interview, there will likely be opportunities for informal conversations with potential hosts. This might take place in happy hours, in online “office hours”, in elevators, etc. The key to informational conversations is answering for yourself, “Are these the kind of people I would like to work with?” and keep in mind that the hiring office representatives are asking themselves the same question. Having personality compatibility is a very important part of the job interview process, and these informal conversations are key both for the offices and for fellows to carry out their ranking process. The following section lists “Dos and Don’ts” from former fellows on informal conversations with host-offices.

## Dos

- Think about who your top choices are in advance and make sure you talk to them.
- Try to take some time before the conversation to review names/faces.
- If you were not able to meet everyone in an office of interest during your interview, try to meet them during these informal settings.
- If time allows, find people in offices you will be interviewing with the following day.
- Use this as a chance to get to know potential supervisors/mentors on a more personal level.
  - Consider asking questions not related to work.
  - Speak to fellows currently working in the office to get more insight on the office culture.
- Be ready for some awkwardness.
  - “Odd atmosphere for both hosts and fellows. This format is bizarre - so be mentally flexible. Be ready for conversations to end abruptly and for there to be quiet times between exciting conversations.”
  - “Networking is uncomfortable for many (even extroverts) but be bold enough to jump in and introduce yourselves, and let the conversation flow.”
  - In group conversations can sometimes be tough to get a word in. May have to decide to respectfully leave and come back at another time, or make an effort to pipe up.
- Be respectful to offices you’re not interested in.
  - “Approach people like they're people because they are. Even if you don't end up in a specific office, you'll likely see those people/names during your fellowship and perhaps even further in your career. Being a real, genuine person goes much further in the long-run, especially because you've already signaled to people that you're a good candidate as a finalist.”

# Informal Conversations/Happy Hours

## Don'ts

- Get stuck in a conversation. If you feel it's time to leave the conversation, thank them for their time and have an exit line—for example:
  - “I don't want to keep you all evening,”
  - "It was great speaking with you further, but I do want to make sure I get a chance to talk to some other folks."
  - Say you need to take a water/restroom break.
  - When in doubt, seek out a friendly looking fellow or Sea Grant employee and chat with them to take a breather.
  - Make sure to target and talk to your top offices, but also be sure to talk to other offices you might have some interest in to learn more. Even if you don't place with them, you probably will work and interact with a lot of the people at the happy hours.
- Forget to eat.
- Feel like you have to stay for the entire length of the event.



# Ranking Tips and Tricks

While there is no magic solution for the ranking process, previous fellows have shared some advice to help guide your decision making process. Please remember these are just suggestions, as everyone will take a slightly different approach based on their own personalities and preferences. Additionally, this advice was not given specifically for host office selection by an algorithm.

## What to keep in mind when ranking your host offices?

*What experience are you trying to get out of the fellowship?*

- Something completely new or something related to your previous work? A lot of placement week can feel like ‘this is your one opportunity to do something completely new and different’, and it is certainly an opportunity to do that, but that doesn’t mean it needs to be something unrelated to your interests or goals
- Which positions will help provide you the networking and experience to help you in where you want to go after the fellowship?

*Work-Life Balance*

- Consider your expected commuting time
  - How important is a short commute to you?
  - Will certain offices limit your options for where to live?
  - Think about what you expect your daily schedule to be from what time you would have to wake up, and what time you would arriving home in the evenings
- Consider both your professional and personal interests and values

*Feel the Force*

- Consider where you found good energy during your interviews, and which personalities you clicked with
- Trust your gut - what you read and what you experience are two different things, and make sure you take office personalities/your experience into account, whether a bad experience with an office you were excited about, or a great one you didn’t expect

*Mentorship*

- Mentorship, networking, and professional development opportunities are some of the most valuable assets you can get out of this fellowship year. When ranking, consider which mentors you got along best with and that you felt would be most supportive of you throughout the fellowship. This is not to say that you can’t find great mentorship outside of your direct supervisor.

# Ranking Tips and Tricks

## Strategies for the ranking process

- Consider what experience the host office is looking for, and how well your experiences align with that
- Use your interview notes, including notes about how you felt immediately following the interview. Were you excited, exhausted, confused? Think about if this would be similar to how you felt leaving work each day.
- Create a short list of prioritized goals you want to get out of the fellowship year and think about how each position will get you closest to your goals: .e., interactions with leadership, spending a lot of time working on your own project etc.)
- When you feel equally about certain offices, write them out. Then erase/cover each one at a time and evaluate your gut reaction, and evaluate where you should rank it relation to the others
- **Talk it out.** Oftentimes, you subconsciously know what is best and talking it out with someone can help you to figure it out.

## General things to keep in mind after your rank your host offices

- Humble yourself -don't overthink which is the BEST one, because most would be a good opportunity in their own way. Remind yourself how exciting any placement would be individually.
- Be flexible. Just because you don't end up in the office you REALLY wanted, doesn't mean you can't talk to them. Follow up with offices you were interested in for informational interviews once the fellowship has started.
- After you finish ranking, don't forget how hard it was to do! Remember how excited you were about many of the positions, so you don't set yourself up for disappointment if you don't get one you ended up ranking highly. Your rankings are only half of the equation, and you can be really surprised (and disappointed) by the other half if you get too invested.



# Good luck during Placement Week!

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