

# **University of Nebraska College of Law Career Services Office Interviewing Guide**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### *The Purpose of an Interview*

An interview is “a formal meeting in person, especially one arranged for the assessment of the qualifications of an applicant”. In an interview, applicants and employers exchange information in a process that is designed to help each side determine if the other fits their needs. From the employer’s perspective, they are trying to ascertain whether the candidate measures up to his/her credentials and, sometimes more importantly, whether the candidate will be a “good fit” within the work environment. Applicants are trying to determine whether the employer (and work) truly interests them and whether they can thrive and be comfortable in the position. Preparation and practice are crucial to effective interviewing. Many law students have never interviewed for a professional position. Others may have experienced interviewing but in other professions. This booklet will help you familiarize yourself with professional level interviews in general and, more specifically, prepare you for some of the “quirks” of the legal interview!

### *Screening Interviews vs. Call-back Interviews*

Screening interviews are frequently the first step in the formal interview process. Generally, employers decide who will be interviewed based on submitted application materials. Most often, these materials are resumes and cover letters that a student has sent to the employer (either in response to a posted opening, in a directed mailing campaign, or in a resume collection coordinated through the CSO). Screening interviews may take place at the employer’s office, at a job fair, or at the law school through the on-campus interview program. Through this process, the employer aims to identify candidates who possess the necessary qualifications and who exhibit enthusiasm and potential for success with the employer. Screening interviews usually last 20-30 minutes.

If an employer responds favorably to a candidate, they will offer a call-back interview. These interviews are lengthier and are usually held at the employer’s office. This allows a greater number of attorneys and staff members to participate in the interview process. Quite frequently, the call-back interview focuses more on personality, work ethic, and professional objectives than credentials. If the employer has determined in the screening interview that the candidate can “do the work”, the call-back interview is frequently used to determine whether the candidate will be someone with whom they wish to work.

Some employers do not follow a two-step interview process and simply invite a candidate, based on his or her resume, for a one-time, in office interview.

## II. PREPARATION

### *Do your homework!*

It is absolutely essential that you know as much as possible about the employer with whom you are going to interview. Spending 5 minutes reading the employer's website or glossy brochure is NOT effective preparation! You should never use a screening interview to find out the "basics" about an employer such as what type of law they practice, how many attorneys work there, and where the employer is located. You want to save your precious interview time for insightful questions that convey your interest and not waste the time gathering basic information that can easily be accessed prior to the interview!

The basics:

- Size
- Structure (associate to partner ratio, number and practice area of different divisions within the firm, number of offices, etc.)
- Location
- Areas of practice
- Involvement in the community
- Representative clients
- Current news items about the firm or its attorneys
- Diversity
- Pro bono policies
- Salary ranges
- Billable hours
- The names, biographies, and backgrounds of the attorneys who work there (at the VERY least research those attorneys who will be conducting the interviews)

Where to find the basics:

- The employer's brochure or web site
- The **National Association of Law Placement** (NALP) Directory. The printed version is in the CSO but you can also access the Directory online at [www.nalpdirectory.com](http://www.nalpdirectory.com). This will give you great information about billable hours, salary ranges, number of clerks hired, number of clerks extended associate offers, etc.
- **Lexis and Westlaw**—search individual attorneys or firms in caselaw directories to find representative clients and/or recently decided cases
- **Martindale Hubbell**. The printed volumes are located in the library but you can also access this service online at [www.martindale.com](http://www.martindale.com).
- **Infirmary.com**

While you need to know the employer, it is also extremely important for you to **know yourself!** This can be very difficult for students, especially those who aren't yet sure what type of law is of interest to them. Take heart: no one is asking you to commit to a practice area for the rest of your life, but you do need to be able to tell the employer what about you makes you interested in them! If you know that you want to be a prosecutor after graduation, do not interview with a firm that a) never goes to court and b) has absolutely no criminal law practice!

If you don't know what you are interested in, be able to tell the firm what interested you enough to take time out of your schedule to interview with them. For example, you really enjoy your Tort class. You can say to the employer who has a significant medical malpractice practice, "I'm only a 1L so I'm not really sure what type of law I want to practice. However, I really enjoy my Torts class so I'd love to gain some experience in that area. When I was researching your firm, I noticed that 40% of your practice is devoted to medical malpractice cases. That is what peaked my interest your firm and made me want to interview with you."

***Questions You May Be Asked (and for which you should have answers)***

- How would you describe yourself? Tell me about yourself?
- What do you consider your greatest weakness? Strengths?
- What motivates you?
- What kind of law are you interested in?
- Why did you go to law school?
- Why did you go to law school here?
- What do you like about law school?
- What is your favorite class?
- Are your grades a good indication of your academic achievement? Why?
- What law school activities are you participating in?
- What do you do when you're not in class/studying?
- Have your ideas about being a lawyer changed since you've entered law school?
- If you weren't in law school, what would you be doing right now?
- When are you available to begin work?
- How would a previous employer describe you?
- How did you get your last job?
- What did you gain from your last work experience?
- Describe your ideal level of supervision.
- What problems have you encountered in previous jobs?
- What is the most interesting job you've ever had?
- Have you decided what city you would ultimately like to settle in?
- Why do you want to live in \_\_\_\_\_?
- Do you have family in \_\_\_\_\_?
- What do you know about our firm?
- Why are you interviewing with our organization?
- Who else are you interviewing with?
- What practice area do you see yourself in?

- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- What goals do you have for your legal career?
- What long-term satisfaction do you expect to obtain from a legal career?
- Why should we hire you?
- Do you have any questions for us? (THE ANSWER TO THIS IS ALWAYS YES!)

### *Questions You May Want to Ask*

- How would you describe the firm and the people who work for it?
- How would you describe the structure of the firm?
- What do you see as the benefits/drawbacks of working at a firm of your size?
- For those employers with multiple offices: Are the different offices independent? Is there a shared client base?
- Is there a mentoring system at your firm for law clerks (or associates)?
- How are assignments distributed?
- Why type of supervision and evaluation are given to a summer clerk?
- How many participants does the firm expect to have in the summer program?
- Are offers extended by a particular practice group?
- What percentage of summer clerks is typically offered associate positions?
- What is the firm's current rate of growth?
- What practice areas are growing at the fastest rate? Are there plans to expand into other practice areas?
- What are the firm's expectations for future growth?
- Are attorneys involved in outside activities (local bar association, civic organizations, etc.)?
- Does the firm have a pro bono policy?
- How are new attorneys trained?
- Are there formal in-house training programs for clerks and/or new associates?
- How soon does a new attorney have direct client contact?
- Why did you (the interviewer) decide to join the company/firm/agency?
- What keeps you there?
- What are your attrition rates?
- Describe a typical day for you.
- Describe a typical day for a law clerk.
- How does the firm utilize senior certified clerks?

### *Questions You Should Not Ask*

- ANY QUESTION THAT YOU COULD ANSWER YOURSELF THROUGH SIMPLE RESEARCH!
- Questions that raise problem areas in your application (“I’m getting married in a year—is it ok if I take a two-week honeymoon?”). This can wait until an offer has been made.
- Questions that are most appropriate after an offer as been extended:
  - Salary (ask the CSO if the firm has given recent data about clerk or associate salaries if the suspense is killing you)
  - Benefits
  - Vacation
  - Leave policy
  - Billable hours (you can usually find this out from other sources)

### *Illegal Questions*

It may seem odd that illegal questions come up at all in interviews within the legal profession. If anyone should know what is or is not an illegal question, it should be those working in the law or in law related positions! However, illegal questions do occasionally come up, usually due to ignorance or in an attempt to facilitate conversation. Some examples of illegal questions are:

- How old are you?
- What is your religion?
- Do you plan to have children?
- What does your spouse do?
- What is your ethnic background?
- What special needs do you have regarding your disability?

How you handle these questions, if you ever encounter them, is up to you. There are a number of possible responses each of them presenting certain problems and consequences. Here are a few:

- Refuse to answer, and point out to the employer that the question is illegal at worst or inappropriate at best.
- Respond to the question by saying, "I'm sorry, I believe I missed the point, why are you asking me this?"
- Answer the question as asked without any reference to the appropriateness of the question.

- Try to determine and address the potentially legitimate concern that may lie behind the question and ignore the improper question itself. Below are some examples:

Q. What kind of help are you going to need in doing your work due to your disability?

A. Actually, I do not need any help doing my work. My education and training have more than adequately trained me for the duties related to this position. All I need are some minor adaptations of my desk or work station and colleagues who can relate to me professionally.

Q. Do you plan to have children?

A. I believe my career will be successful with or without children. I have always managed to find a healthy balance between my private and professional life and plan to continue to do so in the future.

If you encounter an interviewer who asks illegal questions, please talk with the CSO. We will keep all information confidential and will talk with you about the options you have in handling the situation with this particular employer and/or how to handle the situation if it comes up in the future.

### **III. THE INTERVIEW**

#### ***Dress for success***

Interviews for law clerk positions and associate positions are professional interviews. If you dress unprofessionally, it reflects negatively on your interest level, your commitment to the interview process, and your ability to represent the employer in a professional manner. **WEAR A SUIT!** Specifically, wear a suit that is clean, pressed, in good condition and fits you well. Pay attention to your shoes. Polish them. Do not wear shoes that are too casual, in need of repair or simply worn out. Pay attention to your hygiene—brush your teeth, shower, go easy on the perfume or cologne. Accessories should be moderate and tasteful. Now is not the time to wear that Playboy bunny tie tack! Strive to appear neat, clean and fresh.

#### ***Bring the right stuff***

Even if the employer has not asked you to bring any materials to the interview, bring the following:

- A copy of your resume
- A list of your references and their contact information

- A copy of your transcript
- A copy of your writing sample

If a firm has specifically requested materials, make sure to follow the instructions given by the firm for submission of these materials. Some firms will ask that you bring the materials to the interview. Others will ask that you submit the materials to their office or the CSO prior to the interview. Failure to follow simple instructions regarding submission of materials reflects poorly on you, leaving the employer to question your interest and/or your abilities to do the work!

### ***Convey your interest***

Employers frequently tell us that candidates are simply unable to articulate WHY they are interviewing with a particular firm. If you have done your homework, this simply becomes a matter of expressing yourself in an enthusiastic but professional manner. Make a list of accomplishments or strengths that make you attractive to this particular employer. Evaluate your strengths and think of specific examples that will illustrate those strengths. DO NOT limit yourself to legal job experience! Many of the skills you have developed in non-legal jobs transfer to the legal profession. However, you must be able to articulate your qualifications in a convincing manner. For example, “I have an excellent work ethic” does not convey the point as effectively as “I am a full time student, work part-time, finance 100% of my education, and I maintain a B average GPA”. Similarly, “I am a people person” doesn’t speak to your rainmaking abilities as well as “I worked in public relations for 3 years prior to coming to law school, have been elected SBA class representative, and am a student member of the American Bar Association”.

Try to connect your current interests and past experiences to the type of work done by the employer. For example, if you did a lot of volunteer work in the past, talk to non-profit employers about your commitment to helping others. If you went to law school for the sole purpose of becoming a prosecutor, tell the Attorney General’s office that very fact! If you worked as a file clerk in a title company and that sparked an interest in real estate law, emphasize that to the small firm that specializes in real estate law.

### ***Be professional and personable***

No matter what your qualifications are, you will not interview successfully unless you establish a positive, professional rapport with the interviewer. Establishing this rapport starts the minute you walk in the door.

Arrive 5 – 10 minutes early for your interview. If you are more than 10 minutes early, go to a restroom and check your appearance (hair, teeth, makeup, or clothing). If you are participating in an on-campus interview, you don’t need to check in with the CSO. You can simply wait for your turn. If you are interviewing in the employer’s office, check in with the receptionist. Let him/her know your name, why you are there, and who you are meeting (e.g. Hello. My

name is Joe Student. I'm here for a 10:00 interview with Jane Lawyer.). **TIP:** Be friendly and courteous to everyone within the office no matter what their title or position. Staff can be extremely helpful (and influential) in the interview process.

Greet the interviewer with a smile and a firm, dry handshake. If you are nervous and your palms are sweaty, keep a handkerchief in your pocket or purse and discreetly wipe your hands before you go into the interview. Maintain good posture (no slouching, slinging an arm over the back of your chair, or leaning over and resting your elbows on your knees). While the interviewer is speaking, be an active listener by maintaining eye contact and nodding occasionally when appropriate.

When you are speaking, exhibit an enthusiastic demeanor and use a confident and conversational tone. Searching for a job is NOT easy but you can't afford to let past disappointments or "job search fatigue" overshadow current and future opportunities! You must project an upbeat and engaging image. **DO NOT SPEAK NEGATIVELY ABOUT PAST EMPLOYERS, OTHER FIRMS, YOUR CLASSES OR YOUR PROFESSORS!** If you have a bad employment experience in your past that you don't know how to address without speaking negatively, talk to someone in the CSO about how to handle it. If you can't stand a particular course or law school subject, shift the focus to something you do enjoy. Even if the interviewer is engaging in negative talk, don't be tempted to follow.

Avoid lengthy conversations about your weaknesses. Acknowledge the question and then move on. Your answers should be confident and unapologetic. For example, if the employer asks why you didn't work last summer don't say, "I interviewed with a lot of employers but I just didn't get any offers". Instead say, "Although I didn't work in the legal field last summer, I took a family law class and a litigation class that strengthened my interest in litigating domestic law matters. In fact, in the fall, I worked as an extern in a firm where I assisted an attorney in a divorce and custody trial." Similarly, if a criminal defense attorney seems concerned about your grades, say "My grades weren't as high as I expected after my first year but my GPA has gone up each semester since. You can also see by my transcript that my strengths and interest lie in the coursework related to criminal law as I received a 7 in my Evidence Class and an 8 in Criminal Procedure."

When the interview has concluded, thank the interviewer for their time and let them know that they should feel free to contact you if they have additional questions. Don't pressure them to tell you whether or not you'll get a call-back interview. It is OK to ask about the general time frame of the recruiting process so that you can plan accordingly.

## IV. FOLLOW UP

### *Send a thank you*

Take notes immediately after each interview to record your impressions of the firm and the people you met. **TIP:** Write down the name of everyone you met so you can remember to send them a thank you note. A thank you note reaffirms your interest in the position and expresses your appreciation to the interviewer for taking the time to consider you. Send the note promptly after the interview (the next day is ideal). Hand written notes make a great impression but if your handwriting is truly horrible, a typed note is fine. Refer back to topics discussed in your interview (both position related topics and “unrelated” topics such as a shared interest in fly fishing) and personalize the message whenever possible. **THANK YOU NOTES SHOULD BE SENT AFTER EVERY INTERVIEW!**

**FYI:** Some firms pay very close attention to thank you notes and track which candidates don’t send them. Take the time to send a thank you note; you’ll thank yourself later!

### *Give the employer time*

Hopefully, the employer has given you a general time frame for the remainder of their recruiting process. If they have not, tactfully ask where they are at in the process and when they hope to conclude. Don’t bluntly ask, “So, when will I hear from you?” If the time period outlined by the interviewer has passed, give them a bit more time. If you still haven’t heard, it is acceptable to contact them. Tell them that you are still extremely interested and offer to provide any additional materials that they might need in their decision making process.

Even if you are extremely anxious to hear from an employer or are frustrated by the process, remember to maintain your professional demeanor! Do not repeatedly contact the interviewers, do not leave a sarcastic or flippant message for them, or otherwise engage in rude behavior. You may no longer care whether you get the position with that firm (and you aren’t likely to if you’ve been acting in such a manner) but you absolutely do not want to jeopardize your reputation and future employment opportunities. You can’t control the behavior of others but you can control your own! Please remember that you are part of a profession and a law school that values professionalism, civility, and respect!

## V. GUIDELINES FOR ACCEPTING OR REJECTING OFFERS

The Career Services Office is a member of the National Association of Law Placement (NALP) and endorses NALP's *Principles and Standards for Law Placement and Recruiting Activities* (Principles and Standards). Reprinted below is "Part V: General Standards for the Timing of Offers and Decisions from NALP's Principles and Standards. You can view the complete text at ([www.nalp.org/pands/pands.htm](http://www.nalp.org/pands/pands.htm))

### **General Provisions**

1. All offers to law students should remain open for at least two weeks after the date made unless the offers are made pursuant to Paragraphs B and C below, in which case the later response date should apply.
2. Law students should reaffirm offers governed by Paragraphs B and C below within thirty days from the date of the offer letter. Employers may retract any offer that is not reaffirmed by the student.
3. Students are expected to accept or release offers or negotiate an extension of the response date by the applicable deadline.
4. After September 15 a student should not hold open more than five offers of employment simultaneously; after October 1 a student should not hold open more than four offers simultaneously; and after October 15 a student should not hold open more than three offers simultaneously. Offers of employment include those received as a result of previous summer employment. For each offer received that places a student over the offer limit, the student should, within one week of receipt of the excess offer, release an offer.
5. Second and third year students may, with the consent of the employer, extend one offer beyond December 1.
6. Employers having a total of 40 attorneys or fewer in all offices may be exempted from Paragraphs B and C below but should leave offers open for a minimum of three weeks.
7. Employers offering part-time or temporary positions for the school term may be exempted from the requirements of Paragraphs B and C below.
8. Violations of these guidelines should be reported to the student's career services office.

### **Full-Time Employment Provisions**

1. Employers offering full-time positions following graduation to law students not previously employed by them should leave those offers open at least until December 1.

2. Employers making offers before September 15 of the student's third year for full-time positions following graduation to law students previously employed by them during any preceding summer should leave those offers open at least until November 1. Upon request by the student, an employer should extend this date until December 1 upon receipt of assurances from the student that he or she is holding and will hold no more than one other offer during the extension period.
3. Employers making offers on or after September 15 of the student's third year for full-time employment following graduation to law students previously employed by them during any preceding summer should leave those offers open at least until December 1.

***Bottom Line on Accepting and Rejection Offers***

Be professional and expect the same behavior from employers and other applicants. If an employer is pressuring you to make a quick decision, take that into consideration when evaluating whether you want to work for that employer! On the other hand, if you receive an offer from an employer that is truly your first choice, don't hesitate to accept and immediately withdraw your name from consideration by other employers. Be gracious when rejecting offers, thanking the employers for their time and the opportunity they presented to you.

If you are ever in doubt as to how to handle an acceptance or rejection of a job offer, please contact the CSO for assistance!

## **VI. THE TOP 10 INTERVIEWING MISTAKES**

This list was compiled from feedback from employers and is presented to help you learn from the mistakes of others!

### **1. Unnecessarily long resumes**

#### **TIPS TO AVOID THIS PROBLEM:**

- Don't bother with an "objective" line.
- Don't list high school achievements/activities.
- Don't use "funky" fonts or graphics that take up space that should be devoted to information.
- Be selective about the information you put on your resume! Every entry should be included for a reason. If it doesn't further your application, leave it off.
- Law students hardly ever need a resume more than one page long! Employers want ONE PAGE RESUMES!
- **HAVE THE CSO STAFF REVIEW YOUR RESUME PRIOR TO SUBMISSION**

### **2. Typos on application materials**

#### **TIPS TO AVOID THIS PROBLEM:**

- Run spell check!
- Proofread your materials.
- Have everyone you know (family, friends, CSO staff) proofread your materials. The more eyes, the less likely a mistake will sneak past you!
- Make sure you are sending the correct letter to the correct employer addressed to the correct firm! Keep notes on who you have met and which firm they work at! Check bar directories or firm websites for correct spelling of names.

### **3. Interviewing for practice**

#### **TIPS TO AVOID THIS PROBLEM:**

- Do your research and know what the employer, position, and work are like before you sign up to interview or submit your materials.
- Know what your interests are and don't feel compelled to conform to others' expectations.

- If you aren't sure what you want to do, make sure you can at least articulate a reason as to why you would want to gain experience with that particular employer. If you can't, don't sign up for an interview. It is disrespectful to the employers (who will sense that you are "practicing" on them and will resent it), unfair to classmates, and, ultimately, a waste of everyone's time.

#### 4. **Coming to an interview unprepared**

##### TIPS TO AVOID THIS PROBLEM:

- If a firm asks for materials ahead of time, make sure you follow their instructions and submit the materials ahead of time! Failure to follow basic instructions makes the employer wonder whether you have what it takes to be a successful clerk or associate!
- While it is great to know the bios and backgrounds of the scheduled interviewers, don't focus solely on that information. Schedules change and employers frequently have to send attorneys different from those scheduled to interview. Don't let this throw you! Know enough about the employer that you can speak intelligently with any of their interviewers! Also, when researching the firm and the interviewers, consult a variety of sources to make sure that your information is current and correct.
- Do your homework and research the basics on each and every firm. Is this time consuming work? Somewhat, but with internet access, the amount of time you'll need is greatly reduced. Is it necessary to interviewing well and getting a job? Yes.
- Have questions in mind for the interviewers. Pick 5-6 of your favorites from the list above and plan to ask about 3 three of them. Ideally, your conversation will spark other questions as well so that most of your questions will be driven from the interview. **Remember, the answer to "Do you have any questions" is NEVER "No"!**

#### 5. **Lack of confidence or professional demeanor**

##### TIPS TO AVOID THIS PROBLEM:

- Review the list of questions you may encounter and practice answering them before your interview.
- Participate in mock interviews, either through the CSO or informally with your friends.
- If you don't feel comfortable greeting people, start practicing. When you meet a new person socially, shake

their hand, look them in the eye, smile, and repeat their name as you greet them. The more you do this, the more comfortable you will become until the process becomes second nature.

- It is OK to be nervous but don't let your nerves take over. If your voice starts to "quiver", take a moment to think about the next answer or have a sip of water. If your hands are sweaty, keep a handkerchief in your purse or pocket to discreetly dry them before shaking hands. If you begin to sweat, keep your jacket on! Make sure you arrive on time (or a little early) so you are not rushed and you have a few moments to breathe deeply and relax.
- It is OK to admit that you are new to the law and have a lot to learn. Employers do not expect you to know everything and they won't be quizzing you on statutes and case law. They are looking for some indication that you have the ability to do the work and that you are a person they would enjoy having in their work environment. Think about what you have to offer in relation to BOTH of these goals and then practice how you will convey that to the interviewer.
- Be aware of distracting/annoying/offensive habits that will detract from an otherwise top-notch interview: slouching, fidgeting, chewing gum, "cracking" your knuckles, using slang or poor grammar, cursing, failing to turn off a cell phone and/or answering a ringing cell phone, etc. **EVEN IF THE INTERVIEWER IS ENGAGING IN THESE BEHAVIORS, RESIST THE URGE TO FOLLOW SUIT!**
- Remember to maintain your professionalism in all contact with the employer including email addresses and answering machine messages!

## 6. Asking "second interview questions" at first interviews

### TIPS TO AVOID THIS PROBLEM:

- Resist the urge to ask and save these questions for later.
- Find out the answers via research or other methods.
- Reconsider your priorities. If you want to know hourly salaries for law clerks prior to interviewing because you simply won't work for less than \$20.00 per hour, reconsider your goals. **The true value in clerking is the experience you gain.** The more "real life" experience you have at graduation, the more marketable you become to employers looking for new associates. Think more about what type of work will interest you, what type of employer

or work environment will make you more comfortable, and how the position will build your skills.

7. **Forgetting that meals/cocktails parties are part of the interview process.**

TIPS TO AVOID THIS PROBLEM:

- Stay away from alcohol at lunches and dinners. If the event is a cocktail party and you drink alcohol, feel free to have one or two light drinks throughout the entire course of the evening. Between each alcoholic drink, drink a glass of water or a soda. If you don't drink, don't feel compelled to do so. If you don't want to bring attention to the fact that you aren't drinking, simply order a cranberry juice or a soda with a wedge of lime or lemon.
- Know and remember your table manners! If you aren't comfortable with the etiquette rules regarding which fork to use for which course, which water glass is yours, etc. review them prior to the meal.
- Don't order something difficult to eat, messy, or that will give you bad breath. If your interview continues after the meal, stop by a restroom to check to make sure you don't have food in your teeth!

8. **Inappropriate attire**

TIPS TO AVOID THIS PROBLEM:

- Err on the side of conservative dress.
- Make sure all items of clothing are clean and pressed and fit you appropriately.
- Try on the outfit a few days before the interview to make sure everything is in order. If you are really concerned, put the outfit on and stop by the CSO for some advice.

9. **Not marketing self**

TIPS TO AVOID THIS PROBLEM:

- Define yourself and be able to articulate what makes you different from others. Know your major strengths and accomplishments as they relate to the job you are applying for and the company.
- Have an agenda. Know what points you want to get across to the employer. Instead of waiting for the interviewer to bring them up, work these points into the conversation as you answer questions.

10. **Confusing an interview with an interrogation.**

TIPS TO AVOID THIS PROBLEM:

- Many candidates expect to be interrogated. An interview is a *business conversation* in which both people ask and respond to questions. Candidates who expect to be interrogated avoid asking questions, leaving the interviewer in the role of reluctant interrogator. Candidates should also refrain from interrogating the employer.
- Remember to do your basic research and to save your benefits/compensation/perks questions for the second interview. This will help you focus on the questions that will help you get to know the employer, evaluate the position, and show your interest!

**VII. THE TOP 10 INTERVIEWER MISTAKES**

This list was compiled from feedback from students and is presented to help you prepare for mistakes commonly made by interviewers. It is up to you to make the most of each interview and you should never let an interviewer's mistake affect your chances for gaining great experience!

1. **Not preparing for the interview**

- Circumstances may arise that make it difficult or impossible for the interviewer to carefully review your resume prior to the interview. You can be offended or you can use this situation to your advantage! Be prepared to walk the interviewer through the highlights and strengths of your application materials if it appears they aren't familiar with your resume.

2. **Engaging in distracting and/or unprofessional behavior**

- Interviewers have been known to talk amongst themselves and ignore the candidate, answer cell phone calls, or even denigrate other employers during the interview process. Don't let this rattle you. Rise above the situation and, whatever you do, do not join them in such behavior.
- Do your best to steer the conversation back to your agenda whenever possible. Sometimes you simply won't be able to redirect this kind of behavior. If you can't, you will certainly want to consider it in determining whether you want to work with this person!

3. **Talking too much**

- Some employers spend a good portion of the precious interview time describing the work and the environment, leaving you little time to ask questions or describe your

strengths. If this happens to you, try to get some of your most pressing questions answered before you go, even if it means asking them as you are shaking hands goodbye!

- Use your thank you note to highlight your strengths and touch on your most important skills, especially if you think they were glossed over due to time constraints.

#### 4. **Conducting interviews when they aren't really hiring**

- Of course, situations change and a firm that conducts interviews with every intention of hiring may find that a change in circumstances dictates otherwise. Don't jump to conclusions if it seems like a firm interviewed but then didn't hire. Even if no one from UNL or this area was hired, you can't assume the firm didn't hire *anyone*. Many firms interview at a number of schools and may have decided to hire a candidate from a different school.
- If you suspect that an employer is simply "vetting resumes", please talk with the CSO. We strongly discourage such a practice and will work with employers to find more productive ways to maintain their presence on campus.

#### 5. **Obsessing about grades**

- Employers are trying to determine if you are able to do the work required by the position for which you are interviewing. One (yes, **JUST** one) of the ways to do this is to look at GPAs and class ranks. Unfortunately, many employers use this one criterion to manage the number of resumes they receive or interviews they will conduct. Do your research and know the hiring patterns of the employer. Have the last 5 associates all been on Law Review? Does everyone's bio include the words "magna cum laude" or "highest distinction"? Knowing what the employer's priorities are will help you plan your approach to them.
- If the interviewer focuses the entire interview conversation on grades, first try to direct him/her to other topics of conversation. Do this by highlighting your accomplishments or by asking a question. If the grade questions persist, try to determine if there is a particular point to the line of questioning. Did you receive a low grade in a class that deals with one of their major practice areas? If so, find ways to reassure them (point to higher grades in their other practice areas, talk about the steady rise in your GPA as you get better at learning the law, talk about past work experiences that relate to the practice area, etc.).

6. **Offensive or inappropriate questions**

- See the earlier section on illegal questions and think about how you might handle one if it comes your way.
- Sometimes an interviewer will ask inappropriate questions in a misguided attempt to put the candidate at ease. Do your best to respond to the question in a professional manner. For example, if an interviewer asks what kind of beer you would like stocked in the office fridge for the afternoon happy hour, don't answer the question with a detailed grocery list for the liquor store! Focus on the positive (if any) in the question and MOVE ON ASAP. Say something along the lines of, "Wow, you must have a great office environment if everyone likes to spend their free time with each other. I noticed that your firm has a very low attrition rate for associates. What do you feel is unique about your firm that inspires such loyalty and job satisfaction?"
- Take into account a "unique" sense of humor. The interviewer may be trying (albeit, unsuccessfully) to break the ice with a bit of humor.
- If the interviewer is truly being ignorant, take the opportunity to *gently* educate them. For example, if an interviewer sees that you are fluent in a foreign language and jumps to the conclusion that you want to work with indigent people, explain that you developed your language skills in conjunction with your education in business because you are interested in international business opportunities. You can further explain that while helping the less fortunate is a noble career path, your interests lie elsewhere.

7. **Uninterested/indifferent/unenthusiastic/lethargic interviewers**

- Let's face it, we all have our "off" days. So do interviewers. The difference is that they have the job already and you are searching for the job! Don't let their off day negatively affect your employment possibilities! Be aware of where you fall in the interview schedule. If you are the 20<sup>th</sup> interview of the day, be aware that the interviewer may be exhausted. Make sure to approach them with an upbeat attitude, energy, and enthusiasm. Hopefully, it will be contagious.
- Just because attorneys may be skilled in asking questions, doesn't mean they are great interviewers. An interview can

quickly slide into cross-examination! Try to break up the rhythm of the interview with questions. If the interviewer is non-responsive, you may go through more questions than you expected. Have some old favorites to fall back on if the interviewer is less than engaging!

- Take the interviewer's behavior and attitude into account when evaluating an employer. If the interviewer looked at the lunch menu during the entire interview, that may say volumes about the value the firm places on its law clerks or associates! **WARNING: Don't immediately condemn an employer based on one person.** Do your best in the screening interview in an effort to make it to a call-back. There you will have an opportunity to meet more employees to determine if the interviewer's personality is the exception instead of the rule! Also, if you are active in networking within the profession, you may have other opportunities to meet other members of the firm to assess the disposition of those who work there.

8. **Being less than honest about their criteria**

- Again, you can't change or control the behavior of others. All you can do is to empower yourself with as much information as possible and proceed based on that information. If an employer says they value a particular characteristic (diversity, prior careers, leadership), take that at face value but also conduct some research into what the employer has actually done to further that goal. If they say they value leadership, look at the bios of their newer associates. What leadership positions did they hold in law school or do they currently hold? If an employer says they value diversity, take note but also look at how they recruit, who they retain, and what steps they are taking to diversify their workforce.
- Challenge the employers. If an employer declines to interview you because you don't meet a certain GPA requirement but their posting or website says they value prior experience, send them a cover letter detailing your past career, how that fits into their practice and their interest in prior experience, and why you would be the ideal candidate for the job. Include another copy of your resume. In other words, don't immediately take no for an answer.

9. **Philosophical questions unrelated to the position**

- These questions don't solicit any information relevant to your ability to do the job and they aren't a very direct way of finding out something personal about you. The only

value they seem to have is as a test of your ability to think on your feet. There are a million of these questions (Who is your hero? What is your favorite book and why? What is the most difficult decision you ever had to make?) If you encounter one of these, take a moment and think. You can even buy yourself some time and say, “That is a very interesting question!” Give a fairly unremarkable answer with a short explanation and then MOVE ON.

10. **Not informing candidates of their decision**

- Some employers are very good about sending rejection letters. Others don't send them at all. If you haven't heard anything from the employer, contact them after an appropriate amount of time has passed. Let them know you are still interested and that you are happy to provide any additional information that they might need as they make their decision. Do not let your frustration show by leaving a sarcastic or flippant message! Always maintain your professionalism even if you feel that others have abandoned theirs!

GOOD LUCK ON YOUR INTERVIEWS! PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO TALK WITH US ABOUT ANY WORRIES, QUESTIONS, OR CONCERNS YOU MAY HAVE ABOUT THE INTERVIEW PROCESS OR THE JOB SEARCH IN GENERAL.

*Your friends in the Career Services Office*