Interviewing

If you choose to do the experiential projects involving interviewing another person, there is a certain protocol to follow. To help your project go more smoothly and be more professional, please follow the guidelines below.

The Informational Interview

An informational interview in a work setting is designed to help you gather information about a particular industry, company, aspect of management, or job responsibilities. It is very important that you not only identify yourself clearly, but also the purpose of your inquiry. You don’t want to give the impression that you are seeking employment. Chances are that you will attempt to contact someone you already know. Even if the person is very familiar to you, conduct yourself in a professional and businesslike manner. You are representing not only yourself but the University.

In choosing the correct person to interview, consider the information you plan to gather. The focus of the course is diversity, so the individual you choose to interview should work in a diverse environment. You can find out this information on most company websites or in local census data. Please follow professional protocol.

• Schedule your informational interviews directly with the person to whom you wish to speak. Leave a phone number and/or email address where you can be reached in case re-scheduling becomes necessary. Let the person know about the interview consent form that you will be bringing with you.

• Choose an outfit that is professional in appearance and pay attention to your grooming.

• Check out your route and the location of the person’s office ahead of time so you don’t become lost and late.

• Plan out your interview questions and be familiar enough with them that you do not have to constantly refer to your list during the interview. If possible, run through your interview with a friend or relative in a mock setting.

• Reconfirm your interview time, date and location on the day before the scheduled interview.

• When you reach the place of business, be pleasant to everyone you meet. Explain your purpose clearly and wait patiently if necessary.

• When you enter the interviewee’s office, wait to be asked to take a seat. Shake hands and introduce yourself. Make eye contact and SMILE! Remind him or her why you are there - to gather information for an assignment. Do not put anything on the
interviewee’s desk. Generally, unless you are a good juggler, decline the offer of beverages.

• Reiterate your appreciation for the person’s time. Go over the purpose of the assignment and the interview consent form, again explaining that he or she can choose to be anonymous in this project, and ask for a signature. Ask permission to take notes during the interview (or tape the interview), but don’t spend all your time looking at your paper.

• Writing good questions takes practice and forethought. Ask your questions, being careful not to ask closed, leading, judgmental or nosy questions (see question suggestions below). Stay on track. Ask if he or she has anything else to share with you that perhaps you didn’t ask.

• Thank the person for his or her time and leave promptly. Follow up with a thank you note within two days. (You will need the proper spelling of his or her name and title, and the address of the company).

• Reconstruct your notes, filling in the gaps, as soon as possible after the interview so as not to lose any data or immediate impressions.

The Personal Interview

If you have chosen to do a personal interview, while much of it will be more informal, there is still protocol to follow in either situation:

• Get permission from the person you want to interview—ask if this is something he or she is willing to do—remember, you’re asking for personal information to be shared with you. Schedule uninterrupted time together and let him or her know approximately how long it will take.

• Explain the purpose of the informed consent form and the option to be anonymous in your project, and get a signature.

• Make your subject feel comfortable by explaining what you’ll be doing—what are your project objectives? Why did you choose him or her to interview? What kinds of questions will you be asking?

• Ask the person’s permission to either record the conversation or take notes. If you are only taking notes, take the best notes you can, but do not spend all your time looking at your paper. You will get a great deal of information from your interview both verbally and non-verbally! Good notes will help you stay organized, and will help you make sense of the information when you need to write about the experience.

• **Ask strong questions.** You must build your questions ahead of time. Writing good questions takes practice. Think about the kinds of information you want to learn, and think about how to ask your questions. Good interview questions are open-ended and
yield more information than a question that is close-ended and will only yield a yes or no answer. When you are interviewing someone, you want to get as much information as possible from him or her. Here are some examples of close-ended questions: “Do you like your current position at your company?” “Have you ever been discriminated against?” All you get from these close-ended questions is a yes or no-type answer.

• In contrast, open-ended questions have the potential for yielding effective information for your project. Open-ended questions typically begin with one of the following words: why, how, what, when and tell me. Here are some examples of open-ended questions. “What attracted you to the hospitality field?” “What kinds of things do you do to encourage diversity in your department?” “Why did your family immigrate to the United States?” Beware of questions that assume, however. Questions like, “Can you tell me about a time when you were discriminated against?” suggests that this has happened. You must be careful not to ask leading, judgmental or nosy questions. Ask if he or she has anything else to share with you that perhaps you didn’t ask.

• Keep to the agreed timeframe and remember to say thank you. The person you interviewed has chosen to share his or her experience with you. Show your appreciation. A follow up thank you note is also appropriate.

• As soon as possible after the interview, organize your notes and fill in any gaps while the information and experience are still fresh in your mind.