

Focused Interviewing
Common Interview Questions & Their Underlying Goals

- Tell me about yourself.
 - **Goal:** To test whether the student provides a brief biographical sketch, then turns the conversation to core traits developed or experiences had which introduce (a) their unique interest in this employer and (b) ways in which they would add immediate value, if given the opportunity. Conversely, does the student's reply simply "run down" facts listed on his/her resume, missing the opportunity to "lead" the interview in a positive direction.
- We're in the thick of recruiting season and meeting with strong candidates at a number of fine schools for a limited number of first-year slots. Why should I hire you, as opposed to one of the 20 other people I'll meet today?
 - **Goal:** To test the effectiveness of the student's "elevator pitch."
- In what practice area are you most interested at the moment? Why? How do you know you'll be good at it? What can you tell me about our _____ department?
 - **Goal:** Can the student demonstrate genuine interest and commitment to a particular area and speak intelligently and persuasively about his/her strengths in that area?
- Why are you interested in working in this city? What can you tell me about it?
 - **Goal:** Does the student's answer demonstrate existing ties to the city and/or specific knowledge of the region's business community, making it a natural fit for his/her desired professional path? Conversely, does the answer rely too heavily on external reasons (*i.e.*, friends, boyfriends/girlfriends) and/or social opportunities not related to the employer and its work (*i.e.*, the opportunity to attend games at Fenway Park)?
- Why, out of all the places you could work in _____, are you applying to work for us, as opposed to any other firm/organization?
 - **Goal:** To test whether the student did specific research on the organization/firm and has a convincing narrative about his/her interest in this particular organization/firm.
- How would you define a "successful" summer?
 - **Goal:** To test whether the student's answer focuses on the ways he/she can best contribute to the success of the employer, or instead focuses solely on anticipated personal gains/benefits.
- What do you see yourself doing in 10 years?
 - **Goal:** To test the student's commitment to the organization/firm, and to see whether they offer up plans to ensure both personal growth and ongoing expertise over time.

- If you could be anything other than a lawyer, what would your profession be and why?
 - **Goal:** Do underlying skills/attributes of the student's stated alternative profession correlate with core skills necessary to excel as an attorney, and does the student intuitively offer up those connections in his/her response?
- Obviously, you have many strengths, but if I asked you to turn your resume over and write down some things that are not so terrific about you, what would you write?
 - **Goal:** To test the student's ability to avoid clichés, and instead describe a unique area of weakness, the existence of which is not a disqualifier from further consideration. Also, does the student avail his/herself of the opportunity to turn the conversation back to the positive, highlighting skills developed as he/she took proactive steps to address and compensate for the offered weakness?
- Tell me about your previous employer. What did you like/dislike about him/her?
 - **Goal:** To ensure that the student remains positive about his/her experience and previous working relationship, instead of taking the opportunity to speak ill of former colleagues or vent personal frustrations.
- Developing relationships with clients (stakeholders) and building coalitions are critical parts of our success. Tell me about how you envision accomplishing these tasks?
 - **Goal:** To test whether the student can point to past relationships, experiences building coalitions, emphasizing his/her own strengths, as well as offer up some new ideas for personal community engagement.
- What questions do you have for me?
 - **Goal:** Are the student's questions insightful, specific, and geared toward demonstrating how he/she can help the firm/organization achieve its goals? Also, do the student's questions reflect knowledge of the employer's practice area and any current "hot topics" for practitioners in that field?