

Interviewing your Professors – Research Seminar – Spring 2014

On February 11th, you need to turn in writeups from interviews you have with two professors in the department. For those of you that do not know who your research project/advisor will be, the main purpose of these interviews is to feel out a few professors that you might be interested in working with and get a more complete picture of the types of research questions they study. For those of you who *do* know who your research project/advisor will be, this is a less critical task – but it never hurts to find out the background of the people that are teaching your classes, and more practice in scientific writing can't be a bad thing.

Another thing that you might want to talk about (especially if you already know who you want to work with) are details about living life as a scientist. (E.g. “how did you get into your field?”, “how did you choose your particular sub-field?”, “what did you do to prepare for your particular research area”, “what do you feel is the most important thing for a graduating undergraduate to know to be ready for life as a professional scientist”, or “if you had to restart your post-undergraduate career today, what would you do differently?”)

As noted in the “Early Semester Due Dates” sheet distributed the first day of class, you may not interview Dr. Larsen for this – I actually want you to go and talk to some professors outside of the classroom.

Some parameters/advice/information:

1. Different faculty members in the department have different schedules. Some don't mind you just dropping by. Others would really rather have you set up an appointment. To be safe, please email the professors you want to interview and ask if there's a time they'd be willing to talk to you for 10-15 minutes for a brief discussion about their research. If necessary, you can say that it is part of an assignment you have for PHYS 419.
2. Make sure to come to the interview/discussion prepared. Some professors might just start talking; others might not know what to say. You are the “interviewer”; it is your responsibility to guide the conversation if need be. That being said, don't interrupt the person talking. Your role here is to gather information; sometimes that might require you asking questions. More often than not, though, it is best to just say a few things and then get out of the way. If the conversation does seem to be clumsy or you're not sure where to go, ask them another question. Some suggestions for career-based questions are listed in the beginning of this document. Here are some ideas for what to ask about in regards to research.
 - What is your area of research?
 - What equipment/methods/procedures/protocols/techniques are central to your work?
 - Could you describe your background prior to becoming a professor at C of C?
 - What specific problem are you working on right now that is most interesting to you?
 - Are you currently looking for students to work with you? (If so, could you briefly describe any projects you already have in mind?)
 - Where did you go to graduate school and why?
3. Please don't consider the above list a “I need to ask these questions” list. What you're being asked to do is to have a couple conversations with professors in the department and write a few paragraph summary for each of what you learned during those conversations. That's all.
4. As always, if you have any questions about what the expectations are or need any help, don't hesitate to ask me.