The Ideal Career Conversation

Purpose: The Career Conversation is not intended to get a specific job. The goal of this process is exploratory and investigative. The Career Conversation provides information that may help you determine if the reality of a prospective career path fits your strengths, interests, and abilities. The Career Conversation also creates an opportunity to find out more about a specific company or organization to become informed about the organizational culture.

Benefits:

- Students may gain a realistic perspective of the prospective career path.
- Students may learn new information about a company or organization for consideration.
- Students may make a connection with a practicing professional that may develop into a beneficial mentoring relationship.
- Students may confirm what was already known about the career path and gain confidence in the career choice.
- Students may gain experience and confidence in advance of the high pressure situation of an actual job interview.

Features of an ideal Career Conversation:

- Student should have a list of 8-10 questions (Career Conversation Guide) prepared in advance.
- The meeting should be face-to-face in an environment that is conducive to conversation, such as a study room in a public library or a non-peak time in a coffee shop. Also, a telephone appointment is acceptable. Just be sure to be in a quiet environment without distracting background noise, such as children and pets. A SKYPE meeting is also acceptable, if there is a geographic, travel, or time limitation. However, when scheduling a SKYPE meeting make sure to have a strong internet connection.
- The meeting should last between 30-45 minutes.

Expectations of Coles College students:

- Students engaging with the business community are representing Kennesaw State University, Coles College of Business and must demonstrate business professional behavior during the course of this Career Conversation.
- All communication (phone, email, text, social media, SKYPE, and Face-to-Face) with the business community must demonstrate effective communication skills, such as appropriate grammar, punctuation, and professionalism.
- Although this is not an interview, a career conversation is a business meeting; therefore, students are expected to dress and behave professionally. It is important to follow through on your commitments, so be on time! Lateness for any reason is unacceptable. Be on time whether you are having a face-to-face, Skype, or telephone appointment. If you know there will be traffic, allow for traffic as you plan. If you are meeting in an unfamiliar part
of town, make a dry run before the meeting. For Skype appointments remember to obtain the Skype ID in advance.

- Be prepared for the meeting by completing research on the career path, the specific position of interest, and the organization.
- Follow-up the meeting with a thank you note. A hand-written note is preferable. Make sure you get the business card of the person you are meeting and add it to your networking contacts file.

The Process

1. **Identify two professionals in accounting and discuss career opportunities based on your interest.** Contrary to popular belief, most professionals are honored to talk with students about their experiences. Alumni are often eager to assist current students.

2. **Choose two professionals from public accounting (audit, tax, advisory, IS audit) in a small, medium or large firm, OR choose two professionals from non-public accounting (manufacturing, service, government, non-profit, other) in a small, medium or large organization.**

3. **Write one Reflection that includes both career conversations.**

4. Research the position/organization/industry. Do your homework so that you can identify why you are contacting this person. Prepare a list of 8-10 questions to ask. A list of question options is provided below, but you are encouraged to create questions.

5. **Contact the professional via phone, or in writing via email.**

Speak directly to the person. If that is not possible, explain to the administrative assistant why you need to speak with this person, and ask what the best procedure would be to contact him/her. Say that you are a Kennesaw State University student seeking to fulfill the requirement for a career and leadership program. Further say you are interested in having a *Career Conversation.*

Additional Tips:

- Determine a mutually convenient time to meet at his/her work site, or some other appropriate public location, e.g. Starbucks, Chick-Fil-A.
- Call to confirm the appointment the day before the actual meeting. Obtain directions and parking information.
- Choose an outfit to wear to the meeting. Men should wear a nice collared shirt, tie, blazer, and clean, polished shoes. Women should wear a dress or skirt/pant suit, and business appropriate footwear. Remember, you are conducting a business meeting. Dress for the job you want.
- Put together a portfolio with paper and pens and copies of an updated resume to take with you. Be sure to write down your questions in the notebook!
- Shake hands and introduce yourself.
- Be conscious of time. Do not spend more than the allotted time, unless the *Bridge Person* initiates extra time.
- At the end of the career conversation:
  - Thank the person for his/her time, shake hands as you leave.
o Organize any business cards obtained so you know where to send future correspondence.

o Immediately after you leave the interview, make notes while they are fresh in your mind.

o Record information about any follow-up activities that were discussed or names of other professionals to contact.

o Within 24-48 hours, send written thank you note using professional note cards or stationery. An email is acceptable, but no texting.

The Career Conversation- Sample Questions

• Pick 8-10 questions to use for your meeting with the professional. Below are a few suggested questions and you may also create questions of your own.

   a. How did you get started in this field?
   b. What is your educational background?
   c. What are your major responsibilities?
   d. What is the most/least rewarding aspect of your job?
   e. Would you choose this career again?
   f. What advice do you have for a person attempting to break into this career field?
   g. What is a typical day like?
   h. What is the most common career path?
   i. What other obligations do you have besides your day-to-day work functions?
   j. What are some lifestyle considerations for this career field?
   k. What are some common entry-level positions in your field?
   l. What kind of salary range and benefits could an entry-level job candidate expect to receive?
   m. What type of individual (skills/personality) would be best suited for an entry-level position?
   n. What are the most important factors used when hiring?
   o. What is the best educational preparation for a career in this field?
   p. Which classes and experience would be most helpful to obtain while still in college?
   q. How do people find out about open positions in this field?
   r. What is the future outlook for this career?
   s. What are areas for potential growth/decline?
   t. How do you see jobs changing in the future?
   u. Which professional journals/organizations would be most helpful in evaluating the field?
   v. Who else do you recommend I talk with, and may I have permission to use your name?
   w. Can you recommend other types of organizations I might investigate or contact?