WHAT IS AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?
Informational interviewing is a specialized form of networking. It is talking with people in careers you are interested in to learn more about specific jobs and career paths and current developments in the legal industry. It is also a way to learn about other potential contacts. The purpose of an informational interview is to gather information and build your network. Building your network is crucial to your career development since the single most common way that people get jobs is through people they know. Although networking may sound intimidating at first, it gets easier with practice and can even become fun.

HOW DO I SET UP INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS?
First, identify persons you’d like to interview. Start with people in your personal network: neighbors, family members and friends. Even if you feel like you don’t have any useful contacts in your personal network, take the time to let your contacts know that you are looking to speak to attorneys in a particular area. You’ll be surprised at how many people your friends and family know. Make sure you tell people that you are interested in getting advice and information, not in asking for a job. Another great resource for finding informational interview subjects is the UT Law Mentor Directory, which is available on Symplicity (see “Mentor Directory” tab.) The Mentor Directory contains a database of UT Law alumni and friends who have agreed to be contacted by students and other alumni for the purpose of advice and informational interviews. Finally, you can find attorneys by city, state, practice area and law school via Martindale at www.martindale.com.

Once you have identified a person (or people) you’d like to talk with, set up the interview. If a mutual acquaintance recommended someone for you to contact, always begin your outreach with that information. Likewise, if you found the contact through the UT Law Mentor Directory, mention that fact. Then, briefly introduce yourself and explain the reason for your call or email; e.g.

“Dear ____, I am a second-year student at The University of Texas School of Law and found your name in UT Law Mentor Directory [or (person) recommended I contact you]. I am really interested in (practice) law. I’d love to buy you a cup of coffee or come down to your office to talk so I can hear more about your practice and career.”

Note that you should not say that you are looking for a job; remember you are just gathering information and making contacts. Further, when possible, try to conduct the informational interview in person rather than over the phone, unless geographical distance prohibits you from meeting in person. Even a 10- or 15-minute chat at the interviewee’s office can be effective and useful in your job search.

If you secure an in-person interview, dress professionally and arrive a few minutes early. Bring a copy of your resume, but tuck it out of sight until there is an appropriate time to give the contact your resume. Since you are conducting the interview, prepare questions ahead of time and research the interviewee’s career and his/her firm or company. Ask thoughtful questions—not questions that you could find the answers to on the Internet or in a library.
Below is a list of sample questions:

- How did you decide on a practice area?
- Did you clerk or intern while in school? Where?
- What law school classes have been most useful to your career?
- What professional publications do you read?
- What do you wish you had known before leaving law school?
- Describe a typical day at work.
- What is the most interesting project you have worked on recently?
- What is the most interesting aspect of your job?
- What aspect of your job would you change if you could and why?
- What advice do you have for me, given my current situation and goals?
- Can you recommend anyone else that you think I should talk to?

This last question is especially important since one goal of networking is to make more contacts. Finally, be sure to thank the interviewee for his or her time.

**How Should I Follow Up?**
Send a thank-you note (email or handwritten) soon after your informational interview. Thank the interviewee for his or her time and mention something that you found particularly useful or helpful from the meeting. You should keep a thorough record of your meeting (name, address, phone, matters discussed, other contacts recommended) so you can follow up again in the future. Contact all of the people recommended by the interviewee so your networking continues to grow. Lastly, let your contacts know when you settle on a job, since they will likely become a professional colleague.

**How Does This Lead to a Job?**
You’ve done all this research and hard work without a specific job opening in sight—what’s the point? Remember that most people get jobs through other people, so informational interviewing increases your contacts and therefore your possibilities for employment. Your new contact knows what you’re looking for, so that even if there isn’t an opportunity for you at this time, they’ll remember you and call when they have an opening in six months. Also, the other people the interviewee refers you to may have a job opening or know someone who has an opening. Be persistent and you, too, will find a job through the people you know—and the ones you will get to know.