Interview Protocol #2 – Early Employment (3, 6, and 12 months)

The interview will employ a semi-structured protocol, below, to prompt participants to reflect on the ways in which their capstone experience did and didn’t prepare them for their current workplace experiences. Interviews will explore participants’ experiences in the first few months of their job following graduation. Because this interview will come after previous data collection (anticipatory interview, weekly workplace surveys, and, for 6- and 12-month interviews, after earlier workplace interviews), prompts may be tailored to follow up on comments or experiences identified in previous data.

The interview will begin with a review of the Informed Consent.

The protocol will follow the pattern below, but is semi-structured to allow for flexibility and exploration of potentially salient but unanticipated topics. The exact language may shift slightly in the course of the interview to create a smooth flow of conversation.

Introduction: As I mentioned when we reviewed the informed consent, what I’m really interested in today is exploring your recent experiences in your job and how they might relate to your capstone design experience.

6- and 12-month interviews (ONLY): I’m going to start by asking you more or less the same questions I asked in our previous interview. If things are the same, I’d still like to hear about them, but I’m especially interested in things that have changed since the previous interview.

I’d like to start by learning a little bit more about your job.

1. (At 3 month-interview ONLY) [If they had a job at graduation]: In the recruitment survey/first interview, you thought you’d be working for an X-size company in X industry. Is that still correct? If not, what’s different?
   [If participant didn’t have a job at graduation, now ask the following:]
   a. What size company do you work for? (a) <100 employees, 100-1000 employees, >1000 employees - large multinational
b. What industry are you in: Aerospace, Defense, Automotive, Consumer Products, Electrical/Electronics, Energy, Biomedical or Pharmaceutical, Civil /Infrastructure, Environmental, Consulting, Other (can select multiple)

2. Tell me a little bit about your job.
   a. What are your typical responsibilities? [6- and 12-month ONLY]: Has this changed much in the last 3 months?
   b. What does a typical week look like for you? What kinds of tasks and activities do you do? Who do you interact with?
   c. [3-month interview only] Using the same scale we used in the weekly surveys, on a scale of 1-7, how prepared do you feel for your responsibilities?
   d. What aspects of your job have you felt the most prepared for over the past 3 months? Why or how?
   e. What aspects of your job have you felt least prepared for over the past 3 months? Why or how?

3. What skills have been necessary for you to do your job?
   a. Where did you develop those skills?
   b. How much or what kind of training have you received from your employer for this work?
   c. If they had training: Tell me a little bit about that experience?

4. Thinking broadly, what has been your most significant accomplishment at work over the past 3 months?
   a. What made it so significant?
   b. In what ways did your capstone experience prepare you for that accomplishment? In what ways did other experiences prepare you (internships, extracurricular activities, other classes, etc.)
5. Thinking broadly, what has been most challenging about your job over the past 3 months?
   a. What do you think made that so challenging?
   b. How have you dealt/are you dealing with that challenge?
   c. In what ways did your capstone experience prepare you for that challenges? In what ways did other experiences prepare you (internships, extracurricular activities, other classes, etc.)

Now I’d like to talk a little bit about how your job compares to your past experiences and expectations.

6. First, how do your work responsibilities compare to what you experienced in your capstone course?
   a. In what ways were your experiences aligned with your capstone course?
   b. In what ways were they different?

7. How did your experiences at work match your initial expectations? (Have notes in from the anticipatory interview as prompts for those expectations)

8. At your previous interview, we talked about how you define engineering.
   a. Based on your experience so far, how would you now describe what it means to be an engineer and what engineers do?
   b. In light of what you just said, to what extent do you see yourself as an engineer at this time? Why? Probe for specific experiences at work that do/do not seem like engineering.
   c. One of the things that undergraduate programs often address are the “broader impacts” of engineering work - e.g. social, economic, political, or cultural issues. Do you see any factors like these impacting your engineering work?

[3-month interview ONLY] Now I’d like to talk in a little bit more detail about some things that you described in your weekly responses:
9. Based on [interesting survey response or prior interview comments], it looks like [this time] was pretty important for your transition. Can you elaborate a bit more on what was going on then?
   a. Researcher will have participant-specific prompts based on journal entries

Now I’d like to step back a little and talk more broadly about the transition from your capstone/senior design class to work.

10. Knowing what you know now, is there anything that you wish you would have learned about in capstone?
   a. Why would that have been important?
   b. Was there anything in capstone that you would take out or change?

11. If you could give advice to the next class of graduating seniors about what to expect when they enter their jobs, what would that be?
   a. Why would that advice be useful?
   b. Would you have listened to that advice?

12. If you could give any advice to your capstone design instructor - including not only what to change, but what to keep doing - what would you say?

13. (6 and 12 month ONLY) Did you receive performance reviews from a supervisor?
   a. Would you be comfortable describing the feedback you received? (If so, please do)

(12 month interview ONLY) Now that we’re at the end of this study, we’d like you to take a step back and think more broadly about your company and broader work context this year.

14. How would you describe the culture of your organization? What’s your workplace environment like?
15. How did your understanding of the broader context of your work/your company evolve over the past year?
   
   a. To what extent were you aware of this bigger picture when you started?
   
   b. How has your work been impacted by this bigger picture? How have you had to adapt to work in a larger context?
   
   c. Are there any ways you think capstone design could have prepared you to recognize and to adapt to this environment? Why or why not?
   
16. Thank you for your time, is there anything else you would like to add that we maybe haven’t covered, as I try to understand how individuals experience this transition from school to work?