



## Mock Interviews: Leveraging AI Resources to Enhance Professional Skills

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*Background.* The mock interview is a simulation exercise commonly used to teach workforce preparation skills. According to Reddan (2008), students who participate in mock interviews report a deeper understanding of interviewer expectations and increased levels of confidence. In our department, we address this important student competency in a required career development course. Due to the restrictions imposed by COVID social distancing, we searched for an efficient and safe alternative to the traditional face-to-face mock interview. Our university career-counseling center provided student access to the Big Interview, a comprehensive artificial intelligence (AI)-based job interviewing training resource, which allows job seekers to prepare and train themselves for interviewing (Skillful Communication Inc., 2021).

*Purpose.* The purpose of this creative teaching activity was to integrate the mock interview into course requirements using the Big Interview online platform. Specific project objectives were to help students: access online training resources; navigate the challenges of video conference interviewing; gain confidence during the interview process; and evaluate effective and ineffective interviewing skills.

*Implementation.* This project was initiated in the career development course ( $n = 93$ ) offered in a 100% remote format. Course content was delivered weekly through live Zoom sessions and relied heavily on online simulation exercises to achieve course objectives. A three-step iterative process offered students ongoing self-reflection, assessment, and professional growth. During a Zoom class session, we discussed important interview topics such as: interview preparation; tips for behavioral, group, and videoconference interviewing; and follow-up protocol (Fouda 2020). We also provided detailed instructions on how to navigate the Big Interview website including how to create an account, locate additional resources, and record video sessions. At the conclusion of the lecture, students completed an impromptu mock interview. They were asked to respond to one prompt, “Tell me about yourself” in less than two minutes. Touted as the elevator speech, the instructor asked students to excite and inform the interviewer (i.e., camera) with their personal storytelling (Burns, 2016). Students recorded and submitted their responses after two attempts.

This initial activity provided students with an overview of the technology, while creating a benchmark to determine their professional growth. Students evaluated their recordings and identified a strength, weakness, and one change they wanted to make before the final mock interview assignment. Likewise, the instructor evaluated each interview using the same rubric. After students received instructor feedback, they completed the final mock interview based on two current internship postings. The instructor provided a brief company history and specific job descriptions. Further, students were encouraged to peruse the Big Interview website, view tutorial videos, and search for example questions for entry-level positions. In the second mock interview simulation, students responded to four interview questions selected from the bank of over 100 questions. The prompts were: “Tell me what you know about our company,” “Tell me

about a time you went above and beyond expectations,” “Give me an example of when you had to work on a team with someone difficult,” and “What questions do you have for me?” Students were given two attempts and two minutes to record their response to each question. Students submitted their final recordings within the Big Interview platform. Unlike the first phase, we used the customizable rubric within the system to evaluate student recordings. From a bank of 27 evaluation criteria, we selected 10 common criteria. Students completed a self-assessment using the same rubric. As a final step, we conducted a Zoom poll survey to capture student’s overall experiences with the learning platform. The questions measured student’s satisfaction with and use of the online resource.

*Effectiveness.* The self-assessment was an integral part of the learning process. During the first phase, almost half of the students (47%) rated themselves either the same or higher than the instructor rated them. Conversely, during the second phase approximately 75% of student ratings were lower than instructor ratings. Strengths highlighted by both students and faculty included great enthusiasm, clear voice, and concise responses. Weaknesses identified were overuse of filler words, distracting video backgrounds, and overall nervousness. When asked what they would like to change for the second interview, most indicated improved eye contact. Overwhelmingly, students were positive about their mock interview experience. Approximately 90% viewed the Big Interview as a valuable university resource and would recommend to other college students. Although 76% of the students plan on using the online tools before their next job interview, only half of the respondents (52%) indicated that they used the educational resources prior to the mock interview assignment. Both students and faculty could see growth in key areas, particularly student confidence.

*Future Plans.* This activity was a win-win for both the faculty and students. The scheduling of mock interviews for a large-size class remains problematic. This online resource provided an efficient way to conduct the mock interview experience with no scheduling challenges. Students revealed significant growth and awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. Similarly, Hudak et al. (2019) found that video conference mock interviews provide a safe, non-judgmental learning opportunity for students because the experience is free of high stakes consequences. We plan to integrate this resource in future semesters, even as we return to the traditional face-to-face classroom. An obvious drawback of the AI-system is that it is not a dynamic two-way process which allows for the normal give and take that occurs between interviewer and interviewee. Our goal is to complement the AI experience with role-playing and simulation exercises in the classroom. Universities without access to the Big Interview may consider using one of the many free online resources that offer similar A-I platforms (Chand, 2019).

The COVID pandemic will forever transform how we deliver instruction, and subsequently, how students approach their careers. Interviewing via video conferencing is most likely an industry mainstay. Beyond the cost savings to candidates and businesses, these formats allow for ease of scheduling and access to a wider pool of candidates (Joshi et al., 2020). As we prepare students to meet the challenges of the post-lockdown reality, we must lead by example, leverage cutting-edge technology, and create new avenues for student learning.

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