I Have an Interview…
Now What?

Cal Poly Accounting Club
Advisor: Dr. Kim Westermann, CPA (inactive)

Agenda

1. The Professional Landscape
2. Choosing a Line of Service
3. Your Rights in the Interview Process
4. Understanding Offers & Decision-Making
5. Professional Etiquette
6. Should I Negotiate?
7. Resources & Support

The Professional Landscape

- California repealed of the 225-hour rule yesterday.
- AI and offshoring reducing entry-level accounting roles in larger firms.
- Non-Big 5 firms evolving through mergers, PE funding, and ESOP models.
- Many service line opportunities across firm tiers: Big 4, Mid-Tier, Regional, Local.
- Local firms offer internships during Winter for tax.

Takeaway: Stay flexible, informed, and open to multiple career paths.

Choosing a Line of Service

Tax – structured, research-oriented; many self-select after taking a class.

Audit – best option for undecided students; broad business exposure.

Consulting/Advisory – project-based, variety, teamwork.

Corporate Accounting – stability, internal roles, balance.

Tip: Use internships and classes to explore fit. You will learn just as much from a "bad" fit as you will from a "good" fit.

Your Rights as a Candidate

Sober Interactions:

No alcohol at recruiting events, on or off campus.

Offer Durations:

- Fall offers related to positions in California must remain open at least 2 weeks
- You have the right to request a 2-week extension (or longer) to compare firms.

Freedom from pressure:

- No timed bonuses are permitted
- No excessive contact by firms are permitted

Principle: You deserve time and space to make an informed decision.

Understanding Offers & Decision-Making

- Clarify start date, office location, and line of service.
- Ask if offer is contingent on GPA and understand grade maintenance requirements
- Understand the firm's expectations for 225-units.
- Ask about CPA exam or in-house master's support.

Consider Fit Over Speed

- Evaluate culture, mentorship, and firm size before accepting; attend recruiting events to help you assess.
- Informed choices are better for both firms and students.
- If you aren't sure you are making the right decision (firm, line of service, office), ask for more time to consider the contract.
- You have the right to interview with all firms of interest before signing a contract.

Professional Etiquette

Accepting an Offer: Express enthusiasm and confirm details in writing.

Declining an Offer: Be polite and timely; thank the firm for their time.

DO NOT ghost a recruiter—professionalism reflects on Cal Poly.

Asking for More Time: Request extensions early and respectfully.

Reneging: If you choose to withdrawal your accepted offer, let the firm know as soon as possible. Be transparent about why you are choosing to renege (e.g., higher pay, better benefits, stronger fit, etc.).

Tip: The recruiters are professional, friendly, and smart. They are happy to address your questions and concerns – just ask them.

Should I Negotiate ?

- Salaries are mostly standardized; limited room for negotiation.
- Location and start date may have flexibility.
- Ask about CPA review materials or exam support programs.
- Fully remote work may be a deal breaker for some companies and is not ideal for entry level learning.

Key: Be professional and curious. Do your homework.

Common Q&A

- I have 2 offers what do I do?
  - Consider all of the elements of the offer, if all is equal, go with your gut.
- I have no offers what do I do?
  - Network, network, network
  - Show up at CIAD in the winter
  - Talk to a trusted professor
- What is the best way to “show up” for an interview?
  - Be yourself! You want to work for a firm that likes you for you and vice versa.

Red Flags & When to Get Help

- Pressure to sign early or attend events with alcohol.
- Inappropriate or uncomfortable behavior.
- Firms discouraging contact with others or faculty.

Report concerns to:

- CPAC Advisor: Dr. Kim Westermann
- Career Services: Lauren Platte (lplatte@calpoly.edu)
- Title IX Office (for safety or harassment issues).

Key Takeaways

- All interactions should be sober and professional.
- Take time to make informed, values-based choices.
- Fit matters more than speed.
- Ask questions—support is available!
- Have fun! This is one of the only times in life a firm will “court” you – Enjoy it. Pay attention to things that you like and don’t like about a firm.