Informational Interviews

Career Services

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Here to help you get ahead.

What is an informational interview?
In an informational interview, you conduct the interview, asking questions of a contact about his/her career field, experience and/or specific employing organization. These interviews help you collect information in order to explore careers, and they also help you conduct a job search by gaining valuable insight into how best to market yourself to that industry/employer. Informational interviews are NOT job interviews, and you should not ask your contact for a job.

How can informational interviews be helpful?
There are two basic ways to research a career: a) by reading career literature and b) by talking with someone who works in your career interest area. While books and articles are limited in the information they can give you, people working in a career can tell you what they like about the work and what they do on a daily basis, what background they have that prepared them for the career and much more. By visiting with a professional, you can ask the questions important to you, gain valuable interviewing experience and learn about the kinds of positions available in a career field as well as how to look for those positions.

Who should I talk to?
Focus on the types of careers in which you may be interested. As a liberal arts major, the variety of careers for which you are qualified is extensive. Talk to everyone you know and tell them what kind of work interests you. These individuals may have an acquaintance who works in your career area of interest. Career Services has many print publications and Internet links on their website to help you identify organizations with whom you may want to talk; in addition, we can help you connect with alumni and parents who are willing to answer questions about their careers. Lastly, be creative: contact and join professional organizations, read professional journals and newspapers, contact the Chamber of Commerce for listings of employers in specific geographic areas and do research at the A. Frank Smith, Jr. Library Center.

How do you set up informational interviews?
After identifying the name and title of a professional with whom you would like to speak, contact that person either by phone or email and request 30 minutes of their time for an informational interview, either in person or via phone. See Career Services' Networking Scripts handout for ideas on how to initiate this first contact.

How long does the informational interview last?
Remember to keep your interview to approximately 30 minutes. Some people enjoy talking on and on, but you do not want your contact people to be concerned after you leave because your brief visit turned into a two-hour chat which kept them from important work. A quick lunch or coffee break may be a convenient time to meet.

What do you do with your resume?
You may take a resume to give to your contact during the visit. They may ask to see it, it can help facilitate conversation and/or you may ask for feedback on whether your resume looks appropriate to and competitive in their industry.

Some final words of wisdom

- Do not have hidden agendas when you conduct the informational conversation. An "I don't want information; I really want a job" attitude is inappropriate. Do not take advantage of your contact people or put them on the defensive by asking for a job when you said you wanted information.
- ALWAYS send a thank-you letter after the conversation. It is a common courtesy, and you want a contact person to remember you in a positive light.
- Follow up on any leads or contact names that someone gives you, especially because your initial contact may check with the lead to see if you have done so. Your efforts will be useless if you do not follow through on leads.
- Record keeping is very important. Keep copies of all letters or correspondence that you send. An easy way to keep organized records is to catalog all information on note cards, or keep a journal.
- Dress appropriately. Think of an informational interview as you would an actual job interview and dress accordingly.

Sample questions for an informational interview

1. How did you get into this area of work?
2. What is your background and training?
3. How much of your background relates to your present job?
4. What are your main duties and responsibilities?
5. What do you do on a typical day?
6. What do you like most about your job? Least?
7. What characteristics and skills are needed to effectively do your job?
8. What kind of pressures and problems do you face in this career?
9. What is a typical entry-level position?
10. What qualifications are needed for entry into the field?
11. Are there alternative methods to gain entrance into the field?
12. What related fields are available for people with backgrounds such as yours?
13. What is the future of the field in terms of new and expanding opportunities?
14. With what professional organizations do you suggest I get involved?
15. If you were hiring a new entry-level person, what would that candidate be like?
16. What would you do if you were searching for a job in this field?
17. What kinds of advancement possibilities are available with your position?
18. What are salary ranges for entry level and experienced people?
19. Do you know of other contacts that might be helpful to me?