Office of Career Services

Informational Interviews

One of the best methods to learn about organizations and occupations is to talk to people working in your field or specific organization of interest. This method is often referred to as *informational interviewing*. Informational interviewing and networking are critical steps in an effective job search. In many situations**,** informational interviewing is an effective way of uncovering "hidden" job opportunities (employment opportunities that are not advertised). It is estimated that between 70-80% of jobs are never publicly posted. **However, the purpose of an informational interview is to obtain information and learn as much as you can about occupations and industries, not to ask for a job.**

Benefits of Informational Interviews

- To explore career options and to clarify your career goals
- To gather the information you need to choose or refine a career path
- To learn how to break into a field and to find out if you have the skills and qualifications to succeed
- To build confidence for job interviews
- To expand your network of professional contacts
- To discover employment opportunities that are not advertised

Informational Interview Process

Identify the occupations or industries you wish to learn more about

Assess your own interests, abilities, values, and skills to identify the best fields to research. Before starting to conduct informational interviews, ask yourself some basic questions:

- What do I like to do?
- What are my strengths and weaknesses?
- What are some careers that I want to explore?

Identify people to talk to

- Consider people you already know – friends, relatives, fellow students, present or former co-workers, supervisors, faculty members, neighbors, etc.
- Inquire with the Office of Career Services to identify alumni contacts.
- Research local professional organizations. LinkedIn and Facebook are good online research sources. You may also call an organization and ask for the name of a person by job title.

Arrange the interview

In contacting a professional to interview, be sure to respect his or her time. When you place the initial call, ask them if he or she has time to talk. Be sure to have a "sound bite" prepared to introduce yourself and explain why you are contacting them. If you were referred by someone, be sure to use that person's name. It is recommended to start with a phone call. To begin your conversation, consider the following:

> "Hello, my name is _____ and I am a student at the University of Portland. Is this a good time for you to talk? John Smith, a graduate of the University of Portland, said that you would be an excellent person to talk with to learn more about working in the advertising industry. I am a junior and I am beginning to explore my options. I was hoping that you could help me to gain insight. Would you be willing and available to meet for about 20-30 minutes in the next several weeks?

If you are not able to connect with the person by phone, you can follow up with an email introducing yourself and inquiring about a possible meeting. The email might look something like this:

> "Hello, my name is _____ and I am a senior at the University of Portland. I will be graduating in May and I am researching career opportunities in the technology industry. I was given your name by Career Services and I am hoping that you might be available to spend about 30 minutes with me to discuss your experiences in the field."

Prepare for the interview

Once you have contacted people, it is important to remain professional and focus on gathering information. To prepare, follow these steps:

- Read all you can about the field.
- Decide what information you would like to obtain about the occupation/industry/organization.
- Prepare a list of questions you would like to ask the person (see sample list in this handout). Do not ask questions that can be answered by visiting the company website or in printed materials.
- Arrive at the interview with a base knowledge of the organization and, in particular, what the job itself may entail.

Conduct the interview

If possible, try to meet the person at his or her office so that you can get a tour and learn more about the work environment. Because you are spending valuable time and gathering information from the person, it is proper etiquette to treat the person to coffee or lunch. While ideally you will meet in person, in some situations you might conduct the interview on the phone. Keep these tips in mind during the interview:

- Dress appropriately; conservative business attire is best.
- Arrive on time (5-10 minutes early is best).
- When you meet the person you are interviewing, begin with a nice firm handshake and greet the person with a title – Dr., Ms., Miss, Mrs., or Mr.—and their last name to show respect.
- Refer to your list of prepared questions; stay on track but allow for spontaneous discussion. Remember your goal during this time is **to gain information, not ask for a job.** While your contact is a potential contact for future employment, asking for a job in the context of an informational interview is one of the surest ways to shut down the process.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Use a notebook to take notes. Also, you may want to bring along a good copy of your resume. **Do not expect to provide your resume unless the person asks to see it.**
- Before leaving, ask the person to suggest names of other people who you might also meet with for an informational interview and ask permission to use his or her name when contacting them. Make sure you have the correct spelling of the name of the person you met with and the names, titles, company names, and telephone numbers of any contacts you are provided.

Follow up

Immediately following the interview, record the information you gathered. Be sure to send a thank you note to your contact within 24 hours of the interview. Keep the contacts you have met with posted on your progress. The most effective interviewers maintain a relationship with these contacts.

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Sample Informational Interview Questions

- How did you become interested in this occupation?
- Can you tell me about your career path?
- What skills and qualifications are necessary to be successful in this field?
- Is there something that you would have done differently in college based on what you know now about the industry?
- What is the most rewarding part of your job?
- Which part of your job is most challenging for you? What types of problems do you deal with?
- Do you belong to any professional organizations?
- What tips and strategies would you recommend for breaking into the field?
- What does the average work week look like for you?
- What opportunities do you have for professional development and advancement?
- What can you tell me about the culture of this industry?
- What courses and experiences have proven to be the most valuable to you in your work?
- Do you anticipate developments in the field that will affect future opportunities?
- Do you have any tips about what is important to include in a resume and cover letter?
- Can you suggest the names of two or three other people I might contact for more information? May I use your name in contacting them?

Additional Resources

For more information about informational interviews, the following resources are available in the Office of Career Services:

- *Information Interviewing: How to Tap Your Hidden Job Market.* By Martha Stoodley
- *Networking for Everyone: Connecting with People for Career and Job Success.* By L. Michelle Tullier, Ph.D.
- *Power Networking: 55 Secrets for Personal and Professional Success*. By Donna Fisher
- *A Foot In The Door*. By Katharine Hansen
- *What Color Is Your Parachute?* By Richard N. Bolles
- *Masters of Networking: Building Relationships for Your Pocketbook and Soul.* By Ivan R. Misner, Ph.D. and Don Morgan, M.A.

These websites are very helpful as well:

- http://www.career.fsu.edu/experience/information-interviews-guide.html
- http://careernetwork.msu.edu/conducting-informational-interviews
- http://career-advice.monster.com/career-networking/Comfortable-Networking_1/home.aspx
- http://jobsearch.about.com/cs/infointerviews/a/infointerview.htm
- http://quintcareers.com/informational_interviewing.html