

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

This is one of the best methods of networking. Informational Interviewing (also known as Career Conversations) is simply talking with professionals who are currently in occupations you are considering in order to gain information about a career or organization. This information can be used in choosing a major, exploring career options, or preparing for a job search. Be clear with the professional you are contacting that this is not a job interview or a request for a job.

Reasons for conducting Informational Interviews:

Career Research:

- Gain information about specific careers.
- Uncover career options you never knew existed.
- Learn about important issues in a career field.
- Learn how to use your college years to gain experience and prepare for the job search.
- Help you determine which courses and skills are necessary for specific career paths.

Job/Internship Searching:

- Expand your network of contacts in a field for your job/internship search.
- Discover jobs that are not publicly advertised.
- Expand your knowledge of a particular organization or field.
- Learn about how to make yourself a more qualified candidate.
- Build confidence for your job interviews and develop professional communication skills.

For a great online tool visit www.jobshadow.com. This site has a large inventory of Informational Interviews with people from all type of careers.

FINDING PEOPLE TO CONTACT

- Begin by brainstorming what career fields and jobs interest you.
- Start with lists of people you already know: family, friends, fellow students, college faculty and staff, present or former coworkers, supervisors, neighbors, etc. (see if there are any matches to the careers/jobs that you are interested in)
- Use LinkedIn, professional networking website, group and educational pages.
- Connect online via social media sites like Facebook and Twitter.
- Get involved with professional organizations.
- Staff in Career Development can assist you with finding professionals to contact.

Write down names of everyone you know (include family, friends, classmates, co-workers, employers, neighbors, professors, Career Development, etc.):

Using the LinkedIn School Page to find Alumni

Use LinkedIn school page to search for alumni in career fields and jobs of interest.

- Type in the top search box, Gwynedd Mercy University. Click the one for School.
- Click the Alumni tab
- Click the next button to filter Alumni by what they do or what they studied.
- Click the area you want to research or type it in the search box. For example, marketing.
- Scroll down to see the Alumni within that selected category.
- Find people to message and conduct Informational Interviews with.

SETTING UP

Don't be afraid to call or email various professionals. Most people enjoy talking about themselves and their ideas as well as helping others. Remember to make it clear that you are looking for information, not a job. If that person is unable to see you, ask for the name of someone that might be able to help.

Scheduling by email

- **Here's a sample letter requesting an Informational Interview.**

Dear Mr. Michael Scott:

I am a Business Management student at Gwynedd Mercy University, beginning my third semester. I came across your name (from-person/website/place). Human Resources has been an interest of mine since I took a class on that subject. Your firm has an outstanding reputation in that field of practice.

I would appreciate the opportunity to ask for your advice and information on your job and field. Any further insights you have would be greatly appreciated.

Please let me know if you are interested and when would be a good time to schedule a brief conversation. I am available at your convenience, whether that be conducting it in-person, over the phone or email.

Sincerely,

Stevie Janowski

* If someone referred you to this person be sure to mention their name in your email. For example:

Dear Mr. Michael Scott:

Dwight Schrute, who is a Communication Professor at Gwynedd Mercy University, suggested that I contact you about my interest in Public Relations....

Scheduling by phone

- "Hello, my name is _____. I'm conducting career research in your field. I would like to meet and talk with you for about 30 minutes so that I can find out more about your field of expertise."
- "Hi, my name is _____ and I'm a student at _____ University. I got your name from _____. You're in a line of work that I'm interested in, and I was hoping that you could help me gain insights into the profession. I'm sure that my questions could be answered in a 20-30-minute Career Conversation."

BEFORE

Treat the Informational Interview just like a job interview. Dress and act professionally, and prepare as much as possible so you are making the most of the interviewee's time.

- Research the company and career field.
- Develop open-ended questions.
- Plan ahead what you want to communicate about yourself: skills, work values, and goals.

The more you know, the better you'll be able to formulate questions pertaining to the organization and job. The more knowledge you have, the more confident you will feel about your ability to communicate effectively.

DURING

- Develop rapport by discussing the interviewee's views and opinions, personal career development, and likes and dislikes regarding the field. Get into specific questions as they relate.
- Take notes.
- Possibly ask the interviewee to give you advice about your resume and qualifications as well as job search strategies.
- **As you near the end of the conversation, ask for referrals to others in the field. (IMPORTANT)**
- Never overstay your welcome – remember their time is valuable.
- Even though you may have a lot of questions, you should be listening more than talking. You might discover information about unanticipated areas.
- Do not ask for a job. You agreed to ask for advice and information.

QUESTIONS TO ASK

Career Preparation:

- How did you prepare for your career?
- What are the most important qualifications (i.e. education, skills, personality, etc.)?
- Is there something you wish you'd known or a skill you wish you'd had starting out in this industry? Or is there something you wish you had done differently starting out?
- How does my experience stack up to others applying for these types of positions?

Personal Experiences:

- What do you like most/least about your work?
- How does your work affect your personal time?
- How did you get your job?
- What kind of hours do you work? Is your schedule flexible or set?
- What percentage of your time is spent doing the various functions of your jobs?
- What do you believe the remainder of your career to look like?

Career Information:

- What is a typical work week like?
- What obligation does your work place upon your personal time?
- What is the salary range for positions in this field?
- What are some of the challenges and major issues in your field?
- What is the job security like in this positions/field?
- What piece of advice would you have given yourself prior to starting our career?
- What are the greatest pressures, strains or anxieties in this field?
- How would you describe your career atmosphere and the people that you work with?

- What has been the biggest change in this career field?
- What are some of the different work cultures you experienced?
- What type of personalities fit best in your company?

Job Hunting:

- Who are some key employers I should consider?
- What job titles should I look for? How can I locate jobs?
- How long do most employees stay in one position?
- What other related fields should I consider?
- Are there any key words to include in a resume and cover letter when looking for jobs in the field?
- What is the typical job-interview process at this type of company?

Advice:

- Would you mind reviewing my resume/portfolio?
- What professional organizations would you recommend joining?
- Can you suggest other people/resources that can provide additional information?

AFTER

- Record, Analyze, and Evaluate the Informational Interview:
 - What did I learn from this conversation (both positive and negative impressions)?
 - How does what I learned fit with my own interests, abilities, goals, values, etc.?
 - What do I still need to know?
 - What aspects of this person's work particularly interest me?
 - What skills does this person use that you have or feel that you could develop?
 - What other types of careers are related to this field?
- Stay in touch, share information, keep them updated.
- Don't forget to send a thank-you letter after the conversation.

Sample thank you note:

Dear Mr. Gregg Jones:

Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me Thursday to discuss the professional possibilities in the healthcare industry. I was impressed by your knowledge of today's complicated issues and appreciated your insight regarding the ways I can apply my Communication and Economics majors to contribute to hospital administration.

I will be in contact from time to time to keep you posted on my career research. I will send a copy of my resume to your office as soon as it is ready, and I thank you in advance for your generous offer of a resume critique. Thank you for your help and valuable information.

Sincerely,

(Your signature)