Informational Interviews

What is Informational Interviewing?

• One of the best ways to explore career options and plan your job/internship/co-op search is to talk directly with people who work in the fields that interest you.

• Adds a dynamic, personalized dimension to your career research.

• Can be done over the phone or (preferably) in person.

• Typically lasts 20-30 minutes in length.
Why do an Informational Interview?

• Obtain job information on the issues that matter most to you.

• Confirm your interest in specific career fields and/or majors; decide which to rule out.

• Meet people who share your enthusiasm, have similar interests and talents, and who have already put those factors together in their career paths.

• Learn about hiring and employment trends or practices specific to your interest field and/or specific organizations.

• Obtain tips on how to best prepare / present yourself for a career in this field.

• Gain experience, confidence, and skill in communicating with prospective employers.

• Begin a professional contact network contact for internships and full-time positions.

• Ask for referrals (e.g., “Can you suggest others I might talk to about this field?”)
Who Might I Contact?

• Someone who shares a common academic major of interest.

• An alumnus of Cornell University, of your high school, of your fraternity/sorority, etc.

• Someone who works in a career setting or area you imagine you would like or might want to know more about – or someone who works in a peripheral area of interest.

• Someone who works for a particular employer of interest to you.
Where Do I Find Potential Contacts?

• Ask friends, family, friends of family, family of friends, friends of friends, neighbors, employers, colleagues, former colleagues, professors, doctors, athletic trainers, people you meet, etc.

• Contact faculty, Career Center personnel, or other University staff.

• Use The Cornell Career Contact Network (on CornellTRAK) to find alumni and others willing to speak with you about career related issues.

• The Co-op & Career Services Office also has the names of many employer contacts.
How Should I prepare?

- Collect advance information about the specific employer, industry and (especially) the person with whom you will conduct the informational interview.

- Know your attributes, interests, skills, abilities, values, goals, etc. (e.g., those things you’ve learned about yourself thus far in this class).

- Develop rapport by asking the person to talk about his/her job, personal career path, and likes / dislikes about the field (find commonalities and connections between you and the person you are interviewing).
What Questions Should I Ask in the Informational Interview?

• Take the initiative in conducting the interview. You ask the questions, you interview the person.

• In advance, prepare a list of open-ended, informed questions that are focused to obtain basic information about:

  Educational & Experiential Entry Requirements for This Kind of Work
  Tips to Break Into This Field
  Work Responsibilities
  Work Conditions
  Typical Career Paths for This Field
  Lifestyles
Sample Questions

- How did you decide to enter this field?
- What education or training is necessary to perform this type of work?
- How do you spend a typical day or week?
- What work schedules are typical for this career? (overtime, weekends, travel, etc.)
- What functions do you perform? How much variety / routine is in your job?
- What are the most important skills / qualifications to be successful in this job?
- What are the most / least interesting aspects of your work?
- In what type of environment is this work typically performed?
- What might a typical entry-level position involve? What about starting salary?
- What related fields might enable me to combine my skills and interests in ___?
- What professional associations actively serve this field?
- What advancement opportunities exist beyond the entry-level?
- What advice would you have, should I choose to pursue a career in this area?
- Can you suggest others I might contact to learn more about this field?
Additional Pointers about the Informational Interview

• Courtesy and professionalism should be your guides throughout the process.

• Remember to dress appropriately.

• Pay attention to body language and communication.

  • Remember to follow up with thank you notes and to keep in touch.

  • Enjoy yourself!
Questions?