Informational Interviewing Student Guide

Career Services Office
Cazenovia College

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INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Students access many resources while seeking a major/career. Much of what we do when selecting a major is theoretical. We may take a career assessment, speak with a career counselor about various careers and research careers of interest to find as much information as we can about a major/career. Yet there is one valuable tool students can access to get first-hand information about careers they are considering. Conducting an Information Interview is the students’ opportunity to meet with professionals currently working in career areas of interest to students and interview them about their jobs, their career paths and seek advice from the professional to advance students goals. Information Interviewing is one of the most effective ways to understand careers and employment options within majors.

PURPOSE OF INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

To gather information regarding a career from a professional established in his/her career and to obtain information about the professional’s career path, previous positions, career mobility and educational background. Students are also encouraged to seek advice from the professionals they are interviewing. The answers to the questions asked can provide students with invaluable information about the workplace, a specific career/position and make a connection with someone in their fields of interest.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

As you prepare to make contact with a professional in your specific career interest area, create a checklist to help you make the most of the informational interview experience.

_____ Identify specific career interest areas.

_____ Identify businesses, agencies, companies and organizations that employ those with interests similar to yours.

_____ Create a list of people you know who work in the career field you are interested in.

_____ Create a list of people you know. Include family, friends, professors, co-workers, and former supervisors. Contact the people on your list and tell them that you are looking to understand a career field better. Ask people on your list about their careers, who they know and associate with. Brainstorm ideas about who to contact.

_____ Contact the Career Services Office. We can assist you with identifying and contacting a professional to interview.

_____ Contact the Alumni Office. They can assist with identifying and contacting alumni who are interested in interacting and mentoring current students.

_____ Once you have a list of people to contact, research the businesses each are in and find out as much as you can about their business. This will prepare you for your initial contact and with the actual interview.

_____ Compose an e-mail or place a phone call to the person you are interested in interviewing. Prepare what you are going to say or write and remember to be professional. The purpose of this initial contact is to introduce yourself and to request an information interview.
___ Make an initial contact. Be prepared to explain or describe an information interview. Request an opportunity to meet with the professional at his/her place of employment. Ask for a brief period of time such 20-30 minutes.

___ Once you have established a date and time to meet, send a confirmation e-mail.

___ Prepare or update your resume and take it with you to your interview.

___ Prepare a list of questions for the interview.

___ After the information interview, write a thank you note, either e-mail or hand-written is acceptable.

**MAKING CONTACT FOR AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW**

If you choose to communicate with your contact through e-mail, the following is a sample e-mail requesting an Informational Interview. If you are using e-mail to communicate, remember that this is your first contact with a professional and his/her company. **Be professional! Do not use texting abbreviations!**

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am a junior majoring in Business Management at Cazenovia College. I was referred to you by Professor Jones.

I am considering several career options. One area of interest is operations management and I would like to meet with a professional in this area to gain a greater understanding of the operations management field, the requirements for employment, the experiences needed to enter and succeed in this area as well as information about your career path.

Thank you for considering my request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Sarah Reider
Cazenovia College, 2010
315.655.1111

If you choose to make contact by phone, prepare a script before placing a phone call. This allows you the opportunity to practice what you want to say and to not forget anything. The following is a sample phone script to be used as a guideline for requesting an Informational Interview.

**INTRODUCE YOURSELF:** Hello, this is _________________. I am a junior business management major at Cazenovia College. I was given your name by my management professor, Dr. Jones. I am in the process of deciding on a specific career path and Dr. Jones thinks that you may be able to answer questions I have about an operations management career.

**ASK FOR AN APPOINTMENT TO DISCUSS THE CAREER AREA OF THE PROFESSIONAL:** I would like to ask if I may interview you about your career. I would only need about 20 minutes and I would appreciate it if I could come to your office to see your company and get a feel for how your work is accomplished.
**ARRANGE FOR A CONVENIENT TIME TO MEET:** What would be the best time for you to meet? I can work around your schedule.

**CONFIRM THE TIME AND DATE:** Thank you for taking time to speak with me and to schedule an appointment. I will see you at 10:00 a.m. on Wednesday, October 24 at your office.

**BEFORE THE INFORMATION INTERVIEW:** Research the organization and possibly the person you will be meeting with. Find out about what the organization does, the organization’s philosophy, products the organization makes and/or people served. This will help you in your interview to put the answers you receive in context.

**INFORMATION INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

The questions listed below will give you some ideas for questions you may want to ask during an informational interview. Use this as a guideline or create your own questions. Please be sure to be aware of the time you have requested and try to finish your questions in the amount of time you said you needed.

- How did you get started in your career?
- What was your major in college?
- Please give me a general description of the work you do and what are you specifically responsible for?
- What is your typical workday like?
- What do you find most rewarding about your work?
- What are the toughest problems you encounter in your job?
- What are the frustrations in your work?
- If you could change your job in some way, what would that be?
- Does your job affect your personal life? If so, how?
- What educational degrees, licenses or other credentials are required for entry and advancement in this career field? Are there any that are preferred or helpful, although not required?
- What abilities, interests, values and personality characteristics are important for effectiveness and satisfaction in your field?
- How do people usually learn about job openings in your field?
- If you were hiring someone today for an entry-level position in this career field, what factors would influence your choice of one candidate over another?
- What are typical earnings at various stages of a career in your field?
- What are the trade/professional groups to which you belong, and which do you find most beneficial in your work? Do any of them assist college seniors interested in entry-level positions in your field?
- What types of employers, other than ________ own, hire people that perform the kind of work that you do?
- Do you know any employers that offer entry-level training programs or opportunities?
- Is there anything else you think I would benefit from knowing about this career field?
- Tell me about the industry and some of the trends you see emerging.
- What is your philosophy of work?
- How do you define success?
- What skills do you see as being essential for someone in this business (specific computer skills, accounting, instructing/training, public speaking, decision-making, planning and scheduling)?
- Does the organization view internships as a way of getting into this industry?
- What educational or experiential backgrounds do you seek when hiring in this career?
- What advice would you give me about pursuing this career field?
- Would you look at my resume and give me feedback on how it fits in to this industry?

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Do keep an eye on the time. Remember this is your interview so start it on time and end it on time. You may not have time to ask all the questions listed; select those that you believe to be most important to you.