



## **INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS**

Informational interviews are not job interviews, but rather are pre-arranged discussions with professionals within your desired field or organization. Conducting informational interviews not only provides you with information about potential career opportunities, it also builds your network. While the informational interview itself will not secure you a job, it may eventually lead to one, as you build your network and make yourself known to others within your desired career field. Informational interviewing is also a great way to practice your interviewing skills.

Getting out and talking with people in the field is one of the most important parts of the career exploration process. This can be intimidating for many students, but keep in mind that most people enjoy talking about themselves and are happy to help others. If you politely ask someone to share half an hour of their time, you'll be surprised how often they agree. Consider this—if an undergraduate student approaches you for advice on graduate school, will you agree to a brief chat?

### **Making the Connection**

An informational interview can be initiated by calling, writing, or e-mailing the person with whom you would like to speak. If you contact someone by telephone, be certain to leave a clear and concise message about what you would like to discuss. If you do not receive a response within a reasonable amount of time, you may wish to follow up with a letter or e-mail outlining your request. When writing to or speaking with your contact, you should provide a brief synopsis of your background and mention how you were put in touch with them. Briefly explain why you are seeking an informational interview and request a short meeting, either by phone or in person. You might also consider asking the contact if you may send them your résumé prior to your meeting in order to supply additional information about your credentials.

### **Preparing for the Informational Interview**

Preparation is crucial prior to an informational interview in order to maximize the time you have. Determine your goal(s), and do some basic research about your contact's field and employer.

Prepare a list of questions and take them to the interview. Potential questions include:

- How did you enter this field?
- What made you decide to pursue this type of career?
- What training, credentials, or experiences were critical for you to obtain this job?
- What are your responsibilities and what do you do on a typical day?

- What are the greatest satisfactions you derive from your work?
- What do you like least about your job or organization?
- What is the typical career progression in your field?
- What are the most common issues or problems confronting people in your field?
- What are the best sources for learning more about your field?
- What entry-level opportunities are available in your field?
- What are the most effective techniques for obtaining work in your field/organization? How do individuals learn about job opportunities?
- How would you describe the work environment in your field/organization in terms of teamwork, culture, workload, etc?
- How does your field/organization differ from others?
- Do you know anyone else in your field/organization who would be helpful for me to talk to?

## **Conducting the Interview**

### ***Informational Interview Do's:***

- Be prompt.
- Dress professionally.
- Be prepared. Arrive with a list of questions to ask the contact.
- Be enthusiastic and positive.
- Stay within the time limit you agreed upon.
- Ask questions and listen intently to your contact.
- Ask for your contact's business card.

### ***Informational Interview Don'ts:***

- Don't be too pushy, by doing things such as giving out your business card before the conversation has begun or by talking about a potential job at their organization.
- Don't hesitate to contribute to the conversation.
- Don't overstay your welcome.
- Don't act in an unprofessional manner.

## **After the Interview**

After the interview, record some notes about your interview, and be sure to follow through on anything you said you would do. Write a personalized thank you note and send it to the contact. Not only is this a courtesy, but it also provides you with an opportunity to provide your contact with additional information about yourself. Finally, remember that informational interviewing is a two-way street: it only works if you give as well as receive career information and advice. Always be willing to help your contacts when they need your assistance.