

Conducting an Informational Interview



One of the best ways to learn whether a career option is a good fit for you is to interview a working professional in the field, at their place of business. In this way, you can experience the work setting and learn whether your perception of the duties, challenges, education needed, pay, and opportunities for the future are accurate. Start doing informational interviews at the beginning of your college career. The knowledge you gain can assist you in selecting a major and support and preparing for an appropriate internship.

To Begin:

- **Identify occupations of interest.** Through online research, a career assessment, or an appointment with a career coach, identify occupations that interest you. For example, a psychology major might want to compare a case manager with a mental health counselor and a clinical psychologist. Use the informational interviews to help explore and refine your career interests.
- **Identify individuals to interview.** Use your network of faculty, friends, parents, advisors and the staff of the Career Studio to assist you in locating professionals. Alverno alumnae often are very willing to meet with current students and share information about their careers. You can easily find professionals to interview through Ignite (www.alverno.edu/ignite) and LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com).
- **Call or email the professional and ask for 20-30 minutes for an interview.** Explain that you are a student at Alverno and considering the person's occupation as a possible career for yourself.

Preparing for the Interview

- **You are in charge of the interview.** This means that you must do research on the occupation, the employer and the industry prior to your interview date. Use the Occupational Outlook Handbook (www.bls.gov/ooh) or O*NET (www.onetonline.org) to learn about basic job duties. Use the employer website, business journal articles, social media and a general web search to learn about the organization that employs your interviewee.
- **Draft questions that will help you to determine whether the career is a good match** for your values, work personality, interests, choice of major, etc. The best questions are those that ask your interviewee to reflect, assess, and analyze their career. Avoid questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no; these do not give you useful information.
 - Open ended questions: Why do you enjoy this work?
 - Analyzing questions: How did your history degree help you get this position in public relations?
 - Application of education: How does your liberal arts background apply to the work you do?
 - Evaluating questions: What skills are most valued in this line of work? If you were a college student today, what would you do differently? How can I best prepare for an internship in this area?
- **Research your interviewee.** Check LinkedIn and other social networking sites to learn about your interviewee's background and career. This can help you create career-path questions to ask.

Presenting Yourself as a Professional:

- Dress professionally. This usually means wearing a blazer, dress pants or a skirt.
- Arrive 10-15 minutes early for the appointment and be polite to everyone you meet.
- End the interview at the scheduled time (do not run over time).
- Ask for the person's business card; share your card, if you have one.

After the Interview:

- Within 24 hours, send a thank you note to your interviewee and state how this meeting has helped you.
- If you promised to follow-up in some way (e.g. send a resume, connect on LinkedIn, connect with someone to whom they referred you, etc.), do so immediately.
- If you promised to stay in touch, send a casual communication (e.g. an update on your education or career exploration, an article that relates to a topic you discussed, etc.) every few months.
- Write up notes and thoughtfully consider what you have learned. Is this career a match? Why or why not? What next steps did your interviewee suggest? Is it time to speak with a career coach or your academic advisor about changing/selecting a major or support?

Typical Information Interview Questions:

The professional meeting with you expects that you have done some basic research on the profession and industry, and that you will ask questions that go beyond "what do you do?" Effective questions will provide you with information that enhances your understanding of the realities of the position and what is necessary to be successful in this field of work.

Here are some basic ideas; modify these to fit the specific careers and industries you are exploring.

- I am interested in this field because I enjoy _____. How does this activity fit into your daily work?
- I am thinking of a major (or support) in _____. In your opinion, will study in this area prepare me for the kind of work you do? Are there other courses of study I should consider and why?
- Tell me about your academic and career path: what led you to this work?
- What experiences (academic or personal) best prepared you for this work?
- What was most surprising to you when you entered this field?
- What type of internship experience will prepare me for this work?
- Would you have done anything differently in college to prepare for this job? What and why?
- What kinds of part-time jobs would enhance my resume for this career field?
- How do you see this profession changing or developing in the future?
- My research indicates that new grads can expect to earn about \$XX,XXX as they start in this field. Does this sound accurate to you?
- What personal qualities do you look for when hiring a new graduate?
- Which professional organizations would help me learn more about this field/industry?
- Are there other people you think I should interview? May I use your name when I call them?
- Is there any advice or words of wisdom you'd like to share with me, as I consider this for a future career?