Informational Interviewing

What is an informational interview?

An Informational Interview is a meeting initiated by you. It involves contacting people in fields of interest to you and gathering information about those fields that could help you make valuable decisions. You will be conducting the interview, however, it should be a low pressure situation for you allowing you to make a GOOD impression!

How it helps you?

- You can discover what skills are required for certain jobs and match them with your own abilities and strengths.
- You can gather information on a specific organization (i.e. Deloitte, United Way) or investigate a specific job (i.e., Editorial Assistant at Warner Brothers).
- You will certainly gain confidence in your interviewing skills, and become more comfortable in the interviewing process.
- Most importantly: the people with whom you speak will remain contacts and can lead you to other, perhaps even better contacts and sources of information or opportunities.

How do I get started?

- Contact the Center for Career Development to meet with a counselor about your career interests. Based on your conversation with the counselor, he/she can help connect you with alumni, parents, or friends of the College with whom you can conduct an informational interview.
- Join LinkedIn and the Gettysburg College Professional Network in order to connect with Gettysburgians working in your field(s) of interest.
- Contact organizations that employ people with career interests similar to yours. Utilize resources like a local Chamber of Commerce or State Job Bank to help identify specific agencies, organizations, or companies to contact.

Arranging an informational interview

- Call, email, or send a LinkedIn message to introduce yourself and your purpose for the contact. “I am a sophomore at Gettysburg College interested in the field of ___ and would like to learn more about your position as ____ , as well as the overall career field. Would you be willing to speak with me about your career?”
- Have a referral (either have someone who knows the person make the initial connection or mention that “___ suggested I contact you to see if you would be willing to speak with me about your career.”
- EMPASIZE THAT YOU ARE NOT ASKING FOR A JOB OR INTERNSHIP!
- Keep the interview to 20-30 minutes. But don’t be surprised if the interview lasts an hour, people like to be helpful and enjoy talking about themselves.
• Do some advance research. It is a good idea to develop a basic understanding of the occupational field and companies prior to conducting Informational Interviews.

• Prepare questions prior to informational interviewing.

• If you are meeting in person, dress as if you were interviewing for a job. Women should wear dresses or suits, men should wear a suit and tie.

• Provide a resume. It will give your contact an idea of how you are presenting yourself, and something to remind them of you in the future.

• Compile a notebook with the questions asked and responses received.

• Always ask who else you should contact prior to the conclusion of your discussion. This referral is sometimes the best lead you can get!

• Keep a list of the people with whom you talk and their job titles, addresses and phone numbers.

Conducting the informational interview:

Since you are interviewing for information only, use this opportunity to learn as much as you can about the particular occupation. Ask questions that will provide you with details related to the person’s job responsibilities, typical workday, preparation for the position (i.e. education/experiences), typical career path in the field, growth/trends of the career field, etc. Here are a few examples:

1. Tell me about your present position and some of the responsibilities.
2. What skills or talents are most essential for effectiveness in this job?
3. What do you find most rewarding/challenging about the work you do?
4. What credentials, educational degrees, licenses, etc. are required for entry into this kind of work?
5. How did you prepare yourself for this kind of work?
6. What prior experiences are absolutely essential? What kind of experiences would you most strongly recommend?
7. How much flexibility do you have in terms of dress, hours of work, vacation schedule, place of residence, etc?
8. What types of employers hire people in your line of work? Where are they located?
9. How/Where are jobs advertised (i.e. online, word-of-mouth, Human Resources Office)?
10. If you were to hire someone to work with you today, what factors would be most important in your hiring decision and why?
11. If the work you do were suddenly eliminated, what different kinds of work do you feel that you could do?
12. Based on our conversation, what other people do you believe I should talk to? Can you name a few of these people who might be willing to talk with me? May I have permission to use your name when I contact them?

Follow-up with a Thank You and keep in touch!

• Send a thank you email and/or handwritten note. It will help you be remembered by the contact person in a positive light.

• Keep in touch – cultivate the relationship!

• At a later date, you might want to send a letter or email expressing interest in working for them, recalling your informational interview and enclosing a copy of your resume. You may also want to telephone the contact person, remind him/her of your informational interview and inquire about employment or internship opportunities that they may have knowledge of within your field of interest.

For more information on informational interviewing, contact the Center for Career Development.