

## INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING



Conducting an informational interview is a great way to learn more about the field and organization as well as an effective means to develop your network of contacts. The UCS library provides extensive background information on a variety of careers; in an informational interview, you will get frank advice about a profession or industry and subtle signals about work environments that you will never read in a book. Once you have researched careers or selected a career field and are beginning a job search, you can use an informational interview to get valuable advice about entering and advancing in a field, as well as ideas for locating contacts or job leads within the profession. Information interviewing should not be a starting point for your career research - it should supplement what you have already learned.

### HOW DO I BEGIN?

- **On your internship:** If you are currently interning, you may want to ask your supervisor for permission to conduct a specific number of informational interviews when you are clarifying the logistics and expectations of your internship (See: *Internship Confirmation Letter*). Once settled into your role as intern, you can ask your supervisor whom he or she would recommend as potential subjects for your informational interview. After you have started forging your own personal relationships within the organization, you will acquire a sense of the individuals you would like to interview.
- **Where can I find someone to interview?** There are 3 main ways to find possible interviewees: The UCS library and website (CareerSearch, various library directories); Yale Alumni (through the AYA); and your personal network (family and friends, professors, advisors, professional organizations, deans, masters, etc).
- **How do I initiate contact?** An email or letter to the individual you wish to interview is appropriate (depending on the contact and your comfort level with that person). Indicate why you are interested in speaking with him/her and how long you anticipate your discussion to be. You should expect your interview to last between 20 and 30 minutes unless you have made prior arrangements for a longer meeting, such as a lunch. You can also request a telephone interview (if the person does not live nearby) or an observational visit that lasts a few hours or a full day. **NOTE:** Make sure the email or letter is in your own words, yet professional. Before concluding your conversation, be sure you have agreed on the date, time and place of your meeting. A brief note of confirmation can serve as a helpful reminder to both of you.
- **Be prepared!** Develop a concise opening statement to generate a lively discussion. (You may want to begin by conveying how much you are enjoying your internship, or relay what you have found particularly interesting about the organization...) In your role as intern, you should know enough about your contact's organization and career field to ask well thought out questions. Have pointed questions ready. **NOTE:** Let the interviewee determine the formality of the conversation.
- **What should I do during the interview?** Be sure to dress appropriately; if you have questions about the standard dress for the occupation, feel free to ask when you arrange the interview. Arrive early and don't forget your list of questions. During the interview, listen carefully; the interviewee may answer on of the questions you had planned to ask later on. Observe the work environment, the people who work there, and their daily routine. Feel free to take notes, and ask for a business card before you leave.

## **SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR INFORMATION INTERVIEWING**

In preparation for your meeting, develop a list of topics to discuss. Informational interview questions typically fall into several different categories.

### **OCCUPATIONAL REQUIREMENTS AND EXPERIENCE**

- How did you get started in this field? Is that typical of most people?
- Describe a typical week or day. Would these duties be the same for anyone with your job title?
- What skills and personal qualities are most important for success in this job?

### **OCCUPATIONAL ENVIRONMENT**

- How would you describe the professional climate in your office? In your industry?
- What portions of your job involve interaction with coworkers, clients, or vendors?
- How much evening, weekend or overtime work is required? What about traveling?

### **BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES**

- What are the greatest rewards of your work?
- What are the greatest frustrations? How do you deal with them?
- On what basis are professionals in your field evaluated? How is success measured?
- What is the starting salary range for new professionals in this field? (Do not ask for their salary)

### **OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK**

- What are the opportunities for advancement in this field? Could you describe a typical promotion path?
- What are some growth areas in this field and what impact is that likely to have on job opportunities?
- How is this field likely to be affected by changes in technology?

### **ADVICE**

- What kinds of education or specialized training would best prepare me to do this kind of work?
- What classes can I take or projects can I complete that will also be helpful?
- What professional journals or periodicals do you read on a regular basis? Do you belong to any professional associations? Would you recommend a membership to a student interested in the field?
- How do people find out about job openings in your line of work? Where do people in this field typically look for internship and job opportunities?
- Do you know of any other individuals who might be willing to talk with me as you have?
- How can I best develop the required skills and competencies?

## **FOLLOW UP**

- Send a thank you note or email to the individual you interviewed within 48 hours of your meeting. Mention specific bits of advice that you found particularly helpful. Convey how you will utilize the information and advice he/she shared as you move forward with your career exploration. If he/she referred you to another individual to contact, write that you have contacted or plan to contact the person. Proofread well for grammatical errors and typos-- this communication will leave an important impression of your professionalism. **NOTE:** The note can be hand-written or typed - whatever you feel is appropriate based on the conversation with the interviewee.
- Keep good records of your contacts. Consider devoting a portion of your internship journal to recording names, contact information, and notes from your informational interview, including referrals to further contacts. Also, it is helpful to record the dates on which you sent your thank you note, and subsequent communications with him/her.
- Maintain contact with the individuals you interview. It is appropriate to send another short letter or email at the end of your internship relaying your thanks for his or her insight as well as what you learned through your internship experience. Once back on campus, write another letter or email mid-semester to touch base with your contact to let them know how your career search is progressing.