INTERVIEWING FOR INFORMATION

What is an informational interview?
An informational interview is an interview with someone currently working in a field of interest to you.

Why should I conduct an informational interview?
- To help you make informed choices about where you want to work and what kind of job you want.
- To get “inside information” about places of work.
- To create a network of contacts and make a favorable impression with someone who may be able to offer you a job or a job-lead at some point in the future.
- To build your confidence for your job interviews by practicing asking questions and providing information about yourself – you can’t be rejected after an informational interview!

How do I find people to interview?
Anyone can be part of your network. Here are some people you might consider asking for career-related information:

- Friends, family, neighbors and acquaintances
- Professors, advisors, classmates (current and previous)
- Current and previous employers and co-workers
- People whose careers interest you or that you are curious about
- UMass Lowell's Alumni-Student Career Connections group on LinkedIn
- CareerLINK (Employer Directory)
- People employed at organizations where you think you might like to do an internship or work
- People to whom you have been referred by your contacts

How do I set up an informational interview?
You can set up your interview by phone, letter or email. If someone refers you, be sure to mention his or her name. Here are some things to include in your introduction:

- I’m currently a student at UMass Lowell (indicate what you are studying and when you are planning to graduate).
- I’m not looking for a job right now; I’m just collecting information about various fields.
- I’m really interested in the work that you do.
- I only need 20 minutes of your time to ask you some questions.
- When would it be convenient for you to talk? What is the best way to reach you (phone or email)?

Informational Interview Guidelines
- Try to hold your informational interview in person rather than on the phone, if possible. You'll get a better understanding of what the company is like: how people interact, how they dress, what kinds of facilities are available for employees.
• You can write notes during the interview. Jot down key words to help you remember the conversation and questions asked.

• After 20 minutes, thank the person for spending time to meet with you. If the other person wants to continue beyond 20 minutes, you may.

• Bring your resume with you, just in case they offer to critique it.

• Before you leave, ask for a business card or write down the person’s name and job title, and the company’s complete name, address, telephone number and/or email address.

• Write your interviewee a thank-you note as soon as possible (within 24 hours, ideally) after the interview. Remember to include your name, address and phone number in the note. Be sure to proofread your note carefully for typos and professionalism.

What questions should I ask?
1. What do you do in a typical work-day?
2. How did you get started in this job? What experience, education, training, skills did you need? What has your career path been like?
3. What do you like about your work? What do you dislike about your work?
4. How has the economy affected this industry?
5. What advice would you give me if I were interested in this field/industry/type of job? What classes should I take? What experiences should I get?
6. Who else do you know that I can talk to? (If the interviewee gives you a name, ask if you may use the interviewee’s name when contacting the referral.)

Pointers
• Relax and enjoy yourself.
• Be well groomed and neatly dressed. Professional dress is appropriate. Just like any interview, first impressions count!
• Make eye contact with the person to whom you are talking and smile when it is appropriate.
• Extend your hand when you are being greeted and shake hands firmly.
• Do not sit down until you have been invited to do so.
• Look around and notice your surroundings. Notice what you like and don’t like about what you see, and be sure to put these observations in your notes.
• Be aware that many informational interviews turn into employment interviews. Don’t count on it, but it happens. Be prepared to talk about your background and why you are interested in learning more about this field.
• Gathering job-related information doesn’t have to be a formal process – talk to people you meet on the bus, at the gym, waiting in line at the grocery store, or wherever. You never know who might know someone who knows someone you’d be interested in talking with!

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