

A Guide to the Informational Interview

CAREER CENTER WELCH HALL D-360

COUNSELING, CAREER, & EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

-A SERVICE OF ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT & STUDENT AFFAIRS-



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The Informational Interview

WHAT IS AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

An informational interview is a way of exploring possible career fields and gathering information about careers and positions that may be of interest to you. It's an opportunity to meet with someone who works in your particular area of interest to interview them regarding their position. Informational interviews can accomplish all of the following:

- Provide you with an opportunity to make valuable contacts
- Help you get a better idea of what the job/career entails
- Help you become familiar with the qualifications for the job/career
- Provide you with information about the advantages and disadvantages of the field, the salary range, necessary education and experience, etc.
- Help you evaluate where you might use your skills, and identify skills you need to develop
- Allow you to screen out occupations that you would not be suited for or dislike

IDENTIFYING CONTACTS

Begin by thinking about what it is that you'd like to do. Consider speaking to professors, family, and friends who teach or work in your particular area of interest. They may have friends or colleagues who might be willing to meet with you (doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc).

Potential contacts can also be identified through the Toro Jobs employer directory, the CSUDH Alumni Association, fraternities, sororities, professional organizations, and Linked In profiles. Consider attending conferences in the field in order to meet a variety of professionals.

Stop by the Career Center (Welch Hall D-360) for suggestions for contacts. You can also get names from faculty, business directories, and newspaper and magazine articles.

ARRANGING THE INTERVIEW

It may help you to know that most people enjoy sharing their experiences if they have the time. Initially request a 30-minute interview. Most people are willing to give a half hour of their time.

Contact the person you would like to interview by phone or email. Your conversation might start like this:

“Hello, my name is **James**. I am a student at **CSU Dominguez Hills** and I’m interested in learning more about **accounting**.”

(If somebody gave you the contact, mention that person’s name.)

“**Maria Torres from human resources** suggested I give you a call.”

(Then discuss the purpose of your call.)

“I was hoping that you’d be willing to meet me to talk about what you do and the field in general.”

You may also consider going to the place of business. Inform the receptionist that you are seeking information about a particular career and request to speak to the appropriate person (clarify that you are NOT seeking employment).

If the contact person does not have time for a face-to-face interview due to a busy schedule, consider doing a phone interview, or ask them to suggest a contact.

THE INTERVIEW

Again, be sure to clarify that you are not looking for employment. Explain that you are seeking information to aid you in making career decisions. Remember that the contact is giving you valuable time, so dress appropriately, be courteous, enthusiastic, and prepared.

Select up to 15 questions for your interview and organize them by importance. Below are some suggestions. At the end of 30 minutes, expect the interview to end unless the person offers you additional time. Be sure to thank them at the end of the interview.

1. What attracted you to this field?
 - a. When did you begin working in this field?
 - b. What previous career fields have you worked in?
2. How much education is necessary for this position?
 - a. What level of education is required to begin working in this field? Do you need an advanced degree?
 - b. How much education do you have?
 - c. How much does college training actually prepare you for the skills needed in your occupation?
 - d. Are there certain courses that would be most helpful?
3. What personal qualities are most important in your occupation?
4. What position can a college graduate with no experience realistically expect to obtain in this occupation?
5. What work/volunteer experience and/or skills would be advantageous in this field?
6. What are the sources of satisfaction in your job? What do you like most?
7. What are the sources of frustration or disappointment? What do you like least?
8. What are the required duties of your particular job?
9. What is your typical day like?
10. What are the opportunities for promotion/advancement in this field? How long does it take to get these promotions?
11. What are the working conditions? Do you work alone, with a few people, or in a large group?
12. Is there a professional association in your field that I could contact for information concerning future opportunities?
13. What advice would you give me for locating and obtaining a job in this field?
14. What is the salary range? (Note: DO NOT ask how much the interviewer makes)
15. Is there someone that you could refer me to for additional information about your career field?

HELPFUL HINTS

ALWAYS send a brief thank-you note to the person you interviewed no later than 3 days after the interview. Be sure to express that you appreciate their time and valuable information.

We suggest that you bring your resume to the interview. This way, you will have it available in case the person you are interviewing would like to know more about your background. Also carry a small notebook with you to take notes.

Create personal calling cards with your name, address, phone number, and email. Carry them with you at all times and distribute to potential contacts.

Be organized. Keep a file at home where you can keep the contents of all your interviews, business cards, brochures, etc.

EVALUATING THE INFORMATION

After reflecting on the interview, ask yourself the following questions:

Am I qualified for this career/position? What skills do I possess that make a good fit? What skills would I need to develop?

Do I understand what the job entails? Does it consist of responsibilities that I would enjoy?

Can I realistically perform the duties required? (for ex: a job requiring 60% travel time may not be realistic if you have children)

Does the salary range meet my needs?

Am I following the right educational path? Do I need to take additional classes? Do I need to get an advanced degree?

Does the type of work setting fit my personality?

Do I need to obtain additional training (e.g., an internship)?

If you are able to answer most of these questions, you have conducted a successful interview. Now you have valuable information and a clearer picture of the kind of work that you want to do. Your evaluation of the interview will help you to make informed decisions about your career.