

# Lourdes University Career Services

## Informational Interviews



Informational interviews are an excellent source of career information. They are brief meetings (20-30 minutes) between two people: one is investigating a potential career and the other is a professional working in the field. Remember, there are multiple benefits from conducting informational interviews:

- (1) Obtain first-hand knowledge about an occupation, the realities and challenges of the work, the skills and qualifications required or recommended, strategies for gaining experience, and emerging trends in the field;
- (2) Enhance your communication skills and confidence in interviewing; and
- (3) Make favorable impressions on experienced professionals, which may lead to new contacts or opportunities in the field including: job shadowing, internships, or other applied learning experiences showcasing the job and career first-hand.
  - The reason you want to meet is **to learn more about the occupation** and **obtain career planning advice**.
  - **You are not asking for a job interview**. If writing to request an informational interview, **you do not need to attach your resume**. However, during an informational interview you can gain feedback about your resume and experience.

Consider informational interviewing as a skill-building campaign, an opportunity to develop and enhance your skills in: interviewing, verbal and written communication, organization, investigation, and exhibiting initiative.

Use the following steps to conduct a successful **Informational Interview**:

### Prepare

1. Self-assess your personal and work values, interests, and skills. Identify what aspects are of most importance to your future career.
2. Select an intriguing occupation in which you would like to learn more.
3. Organize information about the occupation from various sources: online (e.g., O\*Net: <http://online.onetcenter.org/> and *Occupational Outlook Handbook*: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm>). Review these materials carefully to identify any information gaps or concerns you will want to address during an informational interview.
4. Select questions (10-15) to ask during your interview. See the reverse side of this handout for examples.
5. Create an informational interview guide by typing the questions you intend to ask during your informational interview and leaving space after each question for notes.

### Contact

6. Select industries or organizations you would like to learn more about and identify persons of interest to interview.
  - Make a contact list with interviewee's name, title, organization, mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address.
  - If you have trouble finding a contact, call the human resources department of an organization of interest to identify a staff member who would be a good source of information (e.g., someone who is well respected in the field, someone who has been with the company for 3+ years, etc.). You also can identify potential contacts by speaking with a Career Services staff member.
7. Schedule and conduct an informational interview. Repeat this process to gain insights about potential career paths.
  - Request an interview: Calling to schedule is important. See the sample script on the reverse side of this handout.
  - Execute the informational interview either in person, preferably at the contact's workplace to gain a first-hand perspective of the work environment, or via the phone.

### Tips

- Gain confidence by engaging in a low-stress, **mock** informational interview with a family friend or a Career Services staff member.
- Don't take negative responses personally. Organizations may be understaffed, you may have caught the person at a bad time or other factors may be involved. Just remember, you want assistance, not hindrance.
- Be courteous and honest about your intentions and the professional's time commitment.
- Be prepared to answer questions the professional may ask: What do you already know about the occupation, and where did you get this information? or What attracted you to this career field?
- If conducting the interview in person, dress in business casual.

### Follow-Up

8. After your informational interview, reflect on your thoughts, feelings, and reactions to what you learned. Note these comments on the back of your informational interview guide (Created in Step 5).
  - How do your personal and work values, interests, and skills align with this occupation based on the information you obtained from the interview? What do you find intriguing? What puts you off? What additional information do you need?
9. Write and send a thank you letter to the professional within 48 hours.

## Informational Interviews

When seeking an informational interview, it is common to be nervous. The best way to combat nervousness is to be prepared. See the Telephone Informational Interview Request Components below as a guide to help you ensure that the potential interviewee has the necessary information to understand why you are calling and why he/she should assist you. If you don't feel comfortable ad-libbing, utilize a script (see the Sample Telephone Informational Interview Request) when calling potential informational interview contacts.

### Telephone Informational Interview Request Components:

*Greeting:* Dr./Mr./Ms. Last Name;

*Introduction:* State your first and last name, class standing, and Lourdes University;

*Reference:* Identify how you learned about the contact, who gave you his/her name;

*Statement of Purpose:* Indicate that your goal is to collect information about a perspective career; remember, you are NOT seeking an actual job;

*Statement of Interest:* Express why you want to learn more about the profession (this gives the professional a reason to help you);

*Closing:* Ask to schedule a 20-30 minute informational interview at a convenient time.

### Sample Telephone Informational Interview Request:

Hello, Ms. \_\_\_\_\_, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a (sophomore) at Lourdes University. I obtained your name from \_\_\_\_\_ (name, how you know the person) who suggested you would be a great source of information about careers in \_\_\_\_\_. After researching various occupations, I have become very interested in \_\_\_\_\_ (name the occupation) because \_\_\_\_\_ (offer a reason why it appeals to you), and I would like your advice and guidance on how I can best prepare for a career in the field. Would you be willing to meet with me for a 20-30 minute informational interview, at your convenience, so I can ask questions about the profession and your career path?

*What happens if you call someone who has 20 free minutes to talk? You can go ahead with the informational interview. Make sure you are prepared by referring to the sample questions listed below.*

### Sample Informational Interview Questions:

1. How did you become interested in this occupation?
2. What attracted you to this particular organization?
3. Tell me about your career path. (e.g., major, types of positions, etc.)
4. Please describe the responsibilities and duties do you have (e.g., types of activities, projects, assignments, problems, decisions).
5. What do you enjoy most about your job?
6. What are the major frustrations in your position?
7. Please describe a typical day in your occupation.
  - a. What is on your "to do" list?
  - b. What are the time requirements for this job? Are you expected to work overtime or weekend hours? Is the amount of time spent on the job due more to the nature of the occupation or to the particular organization?
8. What other careers are closely related to yours?
9. What preparation, education (particular degrees or licenses), training, background, or essential abilities are required for entrance into your field?
10. What opportunities exist for advancement, promotion, or lateral movement within this career?
11. How long does it usually take to move from one step to the next along this career path?
12. How would you describe the culture of the organization?
13. What is the guiding philosophy or mission of the organization? Is it an actuality in practice?
14. What is the beginning salary for someone within your field? What fringe benefits are typically offered by employers in this industry? (DO NOT ASK: What is your salary?)
15. Please suggest any temporary, part-time, or summer work experiences that would help a person prepare for your occupation.
16. What other advice or information do you have for a person considering, preparing for, or entering this occupation?
17. Because you know this occupation well, what other questions should I be asking about it?
18. Are there other people in this field who I should try to meet? May I have their contact information? May I mention your name as the person who referred me?

\*Add any other questions that will help clarify your occupational research or interests.

\*Omit any closed-ended -yes/no questions (e.g., Do you like your job?) and replace with open-ended questions (e.g., What aspects do you like about your job?).

Adapted from: *BIG Decisions* (2005), Chapter 8: Networking, Bowling Green State University Career Center; and Andrews, L. L. (2006). *How to Choose a College Major*. New York: McGraw-Hill.