

3rd Semester Project Informational Interview

The first time you took this course you completed a resume package.
The second time you took this course you completed a Work Experience Portfolio.

This semester you are going to take the next step and arrange an informational interview. The attached pages describes an informational interview and provides suggestions on how to set one up and what type of questions you should ask.

Project Requirements:

1. Arrange to do an informational interview with someone who is working in the field you are majoring in. If you are in OCEED 91 and have not decided on a major yet – find someone in a field you think you might find interesting.
2. A person in a position of importance is better than someone who is not in the position to make hiring decisions. Even though you are not doing this to ask for a job it is surprising how often job offers get made when the student makes a good impression. So look for managers, supervisors, vice presidents, presidents, CEO's, owners, etc.
3. It's better to go to a company you are not familiar with and interview someone you don't know. This is an opportunity to expand your network so why waste it on someone you already know and who knows you. If you really like a particular company or work at a company you really like and in which you would like to advance - the next best choice is to interview someone who is in a position you would like to have one day – but be sure not to come across like you want THEIR job!
4. Dress and behave professionally!
5. Send a thank you letter!
6. After the interview, you will prepare a typed report, which you will turn in to me discussing the informational interview. The report will include:
 1. How did you decide where to go and who to talk to?
 2. The process you went through to set up the interview
 3. The preparation you took before the interview
 4. A discussion on some of the questions you asked during the interview
 5. The impression you got about the person and the company
 6. The positives and negatives of the career field and/or job
 7. Are you going to pursue this career field and or job? Why or why not?
 8. Any other items of interest you would like to include.
7. The body of the report should be 3 to 4 typed pages and should include a title page, and an addendum, which will include a copy of your list of questions, a copy of the notes you took during the interview, and a copy of the business card of the person you interviewed. **Note that the title page and addendum items are NOT part of the 3 to 4 pages!**

Informational Interviewing

WHAT IS IT?

Informational interviewing is talking with people in an informal way about what they do. Through informational interviewing, you can find out about an area of work in general, about a specific industry or employer, and about positions in that industry or with that employer. Although the main purpose of informational interviewing is to find out more about the particular area in which you are interested, it is also a means of starting a network of contacts that can ultimately help you in your job search. **An informational interview is not a job interview!** Job interviews are formal meetings for the purpose of evaluating and screening a candidate's qualifications for a job. Informational interviews are informal meetings to gather information that will lead you closer to your career goals.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Expand Your Knowledge:

- ❖ Get first-hand and current knowledge of the job market in the field(s) you want to explore
- ❖ Clarify what the jobs in a field are really like before you commit yourself. Find out the negative and positive aspects of a field, job, or company. Go beyond job titles to discover what skills, work style, and background are best for the positions you are considering.
- ❖ Learn about salary range and typical career paths in a field, job, or specific company.
- ❖ Decide what you should be reading and what professional associations you should join.
- ❖ Polish your communication skills and learn jargon you will need to work in a specific field.
- ❖ Avoid jobs and careers that are not right for you
- ❖ Expand your network of contacts for future interviews and make contacts with people who may be potential employers

Uncover Potential Job Opportunities:

- ❖ Learn about opportunities that are never advertised or recruited for.
- ❖ Shorten your job search time, find quality jobs, and target jobs that best fit your particular mix of interests and skills.
- ❖ Increase the possibility that you will be invited to job interviews on the referrals you receive

Increase Focus and Motivation:

- ❖ Add to your self-confidence by becoming comfortable with interviewing.
- ❖ Build support for your job search by contacting more people who want to help you.
- ❖ Avoid early rejections when you are still learning about a field, since you are not asking for a job - only information, advice, and referrals.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW: ASSESS YOURSELF

To get the most out of your informational interview, you should know something about your own interests, skills, and values. By doing your homework before an interview, you will be able to further narrow down the types of fields in which you are interested and the types of positions you may want to pursue. Think about what fields you want to explore. What is the content of the work you'd like to do? What type of environment do you want to work in?

To find out more about self-assessment, refer to books such as *What Color is Your Parachute* by Richard Bolles, *The Complete Job Search Handbook* by Howard Figler, and *Wishcraft* by Barbara Sher. Other books in the library describe specific career fields.

WITH WHOM SHOULD I TALK?

- ❖ Ask your family, friends, instructors, and acquaintances.
- ❖ Contact people in your community that you have heard about.
- ❖ Talk with staff at your local Chamber of Commerce.
- ❖ Become a member of a professional association and attend conventions.
- ❖ Scan written material such as newspapers, magazines, and career resource books for people who have published articles in your field.
- ❖ Ask your local reference librarian.
- ❖ Attend job fairs and meet company recruiters or other representatives.

HOW DO I ARRANGE AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

Depending on the method with which you are most comfortable, you can:

- ❖ Telephone directly using a prepared statement of your intent.
- ❖ Send a letter stating your intent and make a follow up phone call.
- ❖ Go in person on a drop-in basis.
- ❖ Always tell the person you wish to interview about yourself ("I'm on a career search," etc), that you are asking only for information and that you need only 20-30 minutes of his or her time for a meeting at his or her convenience.

WHAT KIND OF QUESTIONS DO I ASK THE INTERVIEWEE?

Your questions will vary according to whether you are seeking background information on a career field or specific facts on a job or employer. Some general questions are:

- ❖ How did you get into this job/career?
- ❖ What do you like best and least about your career/job/employer?
- ❖ What is a typical workday like for you?
- ❖ If you were in my shoes, what would you do to get into the field?
- ❖ What do people look for when they hire in this field/company?
- ❖ Is there a career path for people in this field/company?
- ❖ What qualifications are necessary to succeed in this career / company?
- ❖ How has your field changed since you started out?
- ❖ Do you know anyone else I could talk to or where else I can go for more information?

- ❖ May I keep in touch with you to let you know how I'm progressing?

HOW DO I EVALUATE THE INFORMATION?

Immediately after an interview, debrief yourself by writing the name and address of your interviewee on an index card or sheet of paper with the answers to the following questions:

- ❖ What positive and negative information did I learn?
- ❖ How does what I learned fit my skills, values, and interests?
- ❖ What else do I need to know? Who else do I need to talk with?
- ❖ What is my next step or my plan of action?

HOW SHOULD I FOLLOW UP?

- ❖ Once you have evaluated the information, you need to:
- ❖ Send a thank you note within 24 hours to your interviewee with a few lines expressing your appreciation.
- ❖ Organize the information into a file folder or card box.
- ❖ Set up your next informational interview or follow the next appropriate step.

DO'S AND DON'T'S CHECKLIST

- ❖ Do respect your interviewee by sticking to your time limit.
- ❖ Do take all information given with a grain of salt.
- ❖ Do interview more than one or two people about the same issue.
- ❖ Do be objective but pay attention to your personal feelings.
- ❖ Do ask for the names of other people to contact.
- ❖ Do prepare a list of questions to ask before your interview.
- ❖ Do keep the focus of the interview on the interviewee.
- ❖ Do ask if you can stay in touch with the interviewee.
- ❖ Don't keep your interviewee waiting
- ❖ Don't send your resume beforehand--if you bring it to the interview for advice on its contents or format, don't bring it out until close to the end of the interview.
- ❖ Don't forget to send a thank-you note! This simple gesture will impress your interviewee more than you can imagine and will ensure you'll be remembered.

MORE SUGGESTIONS:

- ❖ Here are some preventive measures you may take to ensure an informational interview that is satisfying for both parties:
- ❖ Have a definite and reasonable objective for the meeting.
- ❖ Size up the other person's style and build rapport by adapting your own. For example, if he or she seems rushed for time or "all business," don't spend too much time on small talk. Get down to business.
- ❖ Negotiate an agenda for the meeting in the first minute or so. Get agreement.
- ❖ Remember, this is YOUR interview, and the contact you are meeting probably relies on you to guide and control it to quite a degree. If it starts going into the ditch, remember what you came to do!

- ❖ Make it clear as you go along that you HAVE done some homework and know something about the industry or company. One way is to make your questions rather specific.
- ❖ Describe your marketing strategy in a few words, and ask for reactions or feedback. This makes the other person part of your team.
- ❖ Remember the clock. When you have attained all or most of your objectives or have used up your allotted time, express your appreciation and LEAVE!

MORE QUESTIONS FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

- 1) What do you do in a typical day?
- 2) What do you consider the advantages of this job?
- 3) The drawbacks?
- 4) If a person were interested in advancing, what jobs would follow this one?
- 5) What kind of person do you think would enjoy this job?
- 6) If I were to have a job like yours, what impact might I expect on my life-style?
- 7) What is the future outlook in this field/company?
- 8) What suggestions do you have for someone who would like to launch a career in this field?
- 9) What other kinds of organizations, etc. also use this type of job?
- 10) Would you describe your work environment?
- 11) What are the opportunities for advancement in a job like this one?
- 12) How are people usually selected for this position?
- 13) What other occupations are similar to this one?
- 14) What suggestions do you have for me to help me gather other information on this job/field?
- 15) What place does travel & relocation have on a job like this one?
- 16) Please give me a general description of the work you do?
- 17) What are the toughest problems encountered in this job?
- 18) If you could change your job in some way, what changes would you make?
- 19) Which professional /trade groups do you believe are most helpful in this field?
- 20) What abilities, interests, personality traits and /or values are most important for success in this job?
- 21) How do people usually learn about job openings in your field of work?
- 22) If you were hiring someone for an entry-level position in your field, what qualities would you be looking for?