What is an “Informational Interview”?

“Informational Interviews” are professionally-oriented meetings where you ask questions to obtain information and advice about organizations, fields and industries, job functions, and career path opportunities. While you may hope the meeting leads to a full-time or internship position, it will serve you best if that is a secondary motive for the meeting; the primary and overt motive must be for information, insight, and guidance. You should have the attitude that you are developing a strong foundation or network of individuals who, potentially, can serve as mentors and resources in your professional development.

Why should you spend time doing “Informational Interviews”?

Setting up and conducting “informational interviews” takes careful planning, time, and energy but the benefits can be tremendous. Through the process you can:

- educate yourself about a career field
- learn about issues and trends in an industry or organization
- acquaint yourself with an organization’s culture, philosophy, services, and products
- develop a network of people who know about your goals, interests, and skills
- gather information about career transition and progression
- meet people who may become valued resources and professional friends
- receive advice about course selection and projects as well as refining your resume or cover letter
- present yourself as an interested candidate who is eager to learn about an industry or organization
- develop leads to full-time employment and internships.

How do you set up an “Informational Interview”?

First, identify what type of information you want to obtain.

- Do you want to learn about a particular position/functional area, organization, or industry?
- Are you hoping to learn more about a geographic region?
- Would you like to gain insight on issues and trends in the field or how an organization is responding to those issues and trends?
- Do you want to learn about the career path of an individual or within an industry or organization?
- Would you like suggestions on how you can best conduct a job or internship search using all the resources available to you?

Second, identify people who can best provide or lead to the information you hope to obtain.

- Use Smeal Connect, Alumni Association, LinkedIn, student organizations, etc.
- Get referrals from colleagues, professors, and staff (and anyone else who may have a lead…)
- Ask for referral suggestions from associations in your industry as well as organizations you target.
- Speak with guest presenters, company presentations, and club functions and ask for referrals.

Third, develop a contact plan which clearly states your intention for meeting and conveys your professionalism. Common ways to make a first introduction would be:
- Use a social network tool to connect with the contact you have found, paying close attention to how they want to be contacted and for what
- Email the person, being brief and to the point and specifically listing how you are connected
- Personal Phone Call- If you choose this method, be prepared to talk directly to the individual, talk to a receptionist or administrative assistant, or leave a message on voice mail. Provide the purpose of your call as well as your name and how you can be contacted or when you will call again.

**Fourth, contact the individual and set up a meeting.** Recognizing that the individual may be busy, request a 20-minute meeting and be thrilled if the individual offers you more time. You might agree to meet at the person’s place of business or for coffee or you may have to schedule a phone call instead.

**Fifth, verify the meeting date, location, and time.** You can do this via e-mail. If helpful to your discussion, you might want to attach or enclose your resume so that they know more about your background.

**Sixth, prepare for the meeting and then meet!** Do your research ahead of time. Clearly understand what you want to gain from the meeting and have questions prepared that will gather that information. Take time to research the person’s organization, position, etc. so that you have a sense of what he/she does. Use the resources on [http://ugstudents.smeal.psu.edu/careers/internships-co-ops/research-resources](http://ugstudents.smeal.psu.edu/careers/internships-co-ops/research-resources).

**Seventh, send a “thank you” e-mail, notecard, or letter after the meeting.** Reiterate your gratitude for the time the individual took to meet with you. Tell how you intend to follow-up with recommendations.

**Eighth, keep in touch as appropriate.** When relevant, provide an update on how you are doing and what steps you are taking based on the meeting.

**Questions You Might Ask**

- What do you do on a “typical” day?
- What part of this job do you find most satisfying? What challenges you?
- What has been your career path and how did you get into your current position?
- What are the “typical” career paths in this field?
- What are particular advantages and disadvantages of working in this field?
- What training or education is required for this type of work? Should I pursue specific classes or internships?
- What makes a person most marketable for positions in this field? What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?
- What opportunities for advancement are there in this field and what is the current demand for people?
- In what ways is this field changing or growing?
- What issues are affecting the field, your position, or your organization?
- What special advice would you give someone entering this field?
- Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
- What suggestions do you have for me to enhance my background and/or resume?
- What are general salary ranges for positions in this field and/or type of position?
- How would you describe your organization's culture?
- With what other individuals should I speak to gain additional information?