

Career Chronicles

What is Informational Interviewing?

Hello, my name is Kevin Allan, and I am a career counselor with Career Services. One of my primary responsibilities is to help students discover their passion or purpose in life and how this translates into a career.

In my experiences with students, I have noticed that when it comes to exploring potential career paths, students fail to take advantage of an important source of career information... people who are already working in careers in which they have an interest. We, in Career Services, call this informational interviewing. This article will examine the basics of informational interviewing.

How do students find about careers?

Some students learn by talking with parents or professors, conducting an internet search, or perusing the Occupational Outlook Handbook. These are all adequate sources. However, the best way to obtain relevant career information is by conducting an informational interview with someone in the field who has first-hand experience. Many students have used this method in deciding between occupations.

What is Informational Interviewing? What are the advantages?

Informational interviewing is a short meeting, 15-30 minutes between a person wanting to learn more about a career and a person working in that career. The purpose of the interview is not to get a job but rather to find out more about jobs and how they may be a fit with your personality and interests. There are many advantages to informational interviewing (see list on this page). Students with an idea of what occupations to explore should start by contacting family, friends, neighbors, relatives, or roommates. These individuals will help you identify potential informa-

tional interview contacts. Other sources of information include Career Services or Alumni offices, professional associations, business journals, or church community. The most common method of arranging an interview is by directly calling the individual to arrange an interview (fear not, as many people are more than happy to talk to you about themselves & career). This method proves to be the quickest, but can also be more stressful for students. Two other methods are: writing an introductory letter with a follow up call or being introduced by a mutual acquaintance.

Tip #1 - It is best to conduct the interview in the individual's office rather than over the phone. This will allow you the opportunity to see their work environment and to potentially meet others within their organization.

Tip #2- Try contacting someone in the actual position and not a human resources professional, as they may not have an accurate idea of the position.

Preparing for the Interview & Interview Day

The best way to prepare for an interview is conducting some preliminary research on the company or occupation. This will provide you with some background information which will demonstrate your interest and enthusiasm. You will also need to develop a list of questions to ask which will keep the meeting organized and running smoothly. Remember to ask open-ended questions to facilitate discussion, which will enable you to gather critical information necessary to formulate opinions on the occupation. Your goal is get a good idea of what the occupation is like and to what extent is it a good fit with you. Try to ask questions relating to job tasks, working conditions, career preparation, and other contacts within the field.

By: Kevin Allen

Tip- Be well dressed, arrive on time, conduct yourself in a professional manner, end the interview promptly, thank the individual, ask for additional contact names, and send a follow-up thank you note.

Next Steps

When you are finished with the interview, it is now time for you to evaluate what you have discovered. In this evaluation process, don't let one particular individual's or company's impression taint your judgment of an occupation. If necessary, perform multiple interviews to assist you in your decision-making process. If you are happy and satisfied with an occupation, you can investigate it further by job shadowing, volunteering, or gaining a part-time job or internship in the field. It is important for you to realize that by doing some early career exploration, you can increase the likelihood of good career fit later. This, my friends, is what it is all about... being able to wake up every morning and looking forward to going into work.

*If you would like more information regarding informational interviewing, please visit careerslsu.edu or make an appointment with a career counselor.

Advantages to Informational Interviewing:

1. Gain in-depth knowledge of a career field or realities of working in a specific occupation
2. Become aware of specialty areas you never knew existed
3. Confirm a tentative career choice or narrow your choices
4. Learn about a specific company or organization
5. Begin to develop a network of contacts to assist you in the future
6. Identify the skills or qualities which employers are seeking.
7. Find out about different entries into a career
8. Improve communication skills

Quick Tips

Ten Strategies to facilitate your career development or job search process over semester break.

- 1) Update your resume- remember to include any new skills or accomplishments gained from your work experiences, classes, or extra curricular activities.
- 2) Look for an internship or volunteer experience- this will allow you to learn a new skill, work on a specified project, or try out a certain industry or field.
- 3) Work part-time to gain and build transferable skills.
- 4) Conduct informational interviews* with professionals in fields which you aspire. This is an excellent opportunity to find out more about the occupation or field while making contact in the industry.
- 5) Job Shadow - similar to informational interviewing but you actually follow a professional around in their work environment for an entire day or week.
- 6) Visit your local library and gather information on industry, career fields, or employers.
- 7) Read newspapers or business journals to keep current with local employers and their transactions.
- 8) Read a career or self-exploration book.
- 9) Join a professional or trade association in a career field of interest to network with other professionals.
- 10) Have a safe, relaxing, and happy holiday!

**Check out the article about informational interviews in this issue!*

Job Outlook 2003 Released— Includes Interesting Statistics

National Association of
Colleges and Employers

Top 10 Places Employers Find New Hires

- 1) Internship program
- 2) Co-op program
- 3) On-campus interviews
- 4) Employee referrals
- 5) Career fairs
- 6) Through faculty contacts
- 7) Internet job postings (own company web site)
- 8) Job postings to career offices (printed)
- 9) Student Organizations/clubs
- 10) Internet job postings (campus web site)

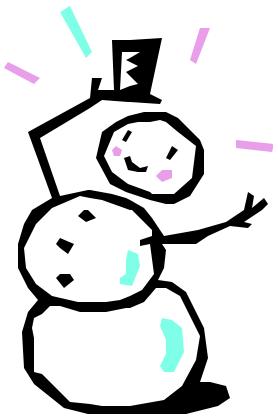


“Employers look for strong communication skills and honesty/integrity when they evaluate college graduates as potential new hires. Every year for the past five years, employers have placed communication skills at the top of their wish lists.

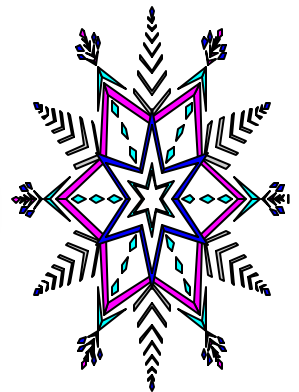
From NACE article, *Finding a Job*

Top Qualities/Skills Employers Seek

- Communication Skills
 - Honesty/Integrity
 - Teamwork skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Motivation/initiation
 - Strong work ethic
 - Analytical skills
- Flexibility/adaptability
 - Computer Skills
- Organizational skills
 - Detail oriented
 - Leadership skills
 - Self-confidence
 - Tactfulness
- Well-mannered/polite
 - GPA (3.0 or better)
 - Creativity
- Entrepreneurial skills/risk-taker
 - Sense of humor
- Friendly/outgoing personality



**Happy Holidays,
from Career Services**



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