

Informational Interviewing



Informational interviewing provides an excellent way to find out the information you need about a particular career, job or major by going to the source. You can feel comfortable about approaching employees of businesses, agencies or people in a professional field as an educational resource. They have the information to answer your questions about their industry, their jobs, and the education they needed to get where they are. **And, they are often delighted to talk with students.**

An informational interview provides an important way to “reality test” your perception of a given role or work environment and to clarify your career goals. It is also a way to build your network of contacts as well as uncover the specific protocol to follow as you refine your resume and job search steps. However, it is very important to remember that an informational interview is NOT A JOB INTERVIEW. It is the field research you need to know in order to pursue opportunities in the future.

RESEARCH

The first step in starting the informational interview process is to target organizations or fields of interest and research what they do. Then, check with your Career Counselor to determine if the Career Center has a contact of interest. Another great Career Center resource is the DU Career Network, available within the DU Careers Online system under the Mentor heading. These contacts are DU alumni and parents of students who have volunteered to assist you in this way. You may research contacts on an organization’s web site and/or call directly and ask for the particular department of interest; then ask for the head of the department. Explain your intent and ask to schedule an interview. Make sure the person understands that you are seeking information only, e.g. “I’m interested in learning more about...”

PREPARE

Prior to your informational interview you need to prepare a list of questions that you would like to have answered. Samples of questions are attached to this handout.

Send an email or call to set up your informational visit. It would be appropriate to ask for 15- 20 minutes. In this case you will most often make a phone contact, so have a script prepared. Below is a suggested script.

“Hello my name is _____. I was referred to you through the DU Career Center (or the name of your referral). I am (student/alumnus) of the University of Denver and am seeking advice regarding _____. I would appreciate an opportunity to learn more about your field through an informational interview.”

If the response is favorable ask set up a mutually agreeable time to meet at their office. If the person prefers to conduct the informational visit over the phone, schedule a time for you to call. Always thank the individual for the time they took from their busy schedule to spend with you.

SUCCESS

Informational interviewing is invaluable for career decision making. The information gained is essential to your analysis of whether your skills, values and goals match the career, position or industry you are researching. Informational interviewing is a step in the right direction toward developing a successful network of people. If you are able to volunteer as a DU Mentor in the future you too will be asked for information from students and alumni.

QUESTIONS FOR EVERY INTERVIEW

- Can you suggest anyone else I can talk to?
- May I use your name when contacting him/her?
- Do you recommend involvement in a professional association? Which one?

FOLLOW UP

Be sure to write a thank you note or send an email to those people who gave their time to you. When you have landed in the career of your dreams, it is also professional to inform those who helped you get there!

SAMPLE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. I would like to know how most people get into this field.
2. How did you become interested in your area of work?
3. Which part(s) of the job is most challenging for you? Why?
4. Which part(s) of the job is most rewarding? Why?
5. Can you see enough growth in this field/business that you would advise me to pursue it?
6. What changes/trends have you seen in recent years, and where is the industry going?
7. What personal attributes do you think are essential to success in this field?
8. How could I research materials and career trends in your industry?
9. Which professional journals and organizations should I know about?
10. What skills are required of a (position of interest) on a day-to-day basis?
11. What experiences have you had that have been invaluable to your learning the business?
12. Which areas of study/degrees would you recommend I pursue before I go any further?
13. How did you get your job?
14. From your perspective, what are the challenges working for this field/type of employer?
15. Would you describe a typical work day? Work week?
16. What motivates you to stay in this line of work?
17. What is the reason most people give when they leave this field?
18. What would you say are the life-style considerations in your area?
19. Regarding promotions, what steps have most people taken?
20. What industry experience do most of the directors on the Board have in common?
21. If you could do it all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?

22. Considering what you know about my skills, education, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I investigate before I make a final decision?
23. From your point of view, what qualifications and characteristics do you look for in employees you hire?
24. Who are the most important people in your field today?
25. What types of positions would I now be qualified for in your organization?
26. Which of my skills do you consider strong points?
27. How does your company compare with the others in the industry?
28. What is your response to my resume? How would you suggest I change it?
29. What training opportunities should I expect in an entry-level position?
30. Have you noticed whether or not it is necessary to change companies in order to advance in this industry?
31. Is there a trend toward an overabundance of people entering this field?
32. Where do you see the opportunities for self-employment in this industry?
33. Are there other job titles that I should be looking at that are comparable to this area of work?
34. What types of positions has your company recently hired?
35. What else do I need to know in order to make an intelligent decision about my career?
36. Would you recommend doing an internship to gain more knowledge, experience or a foot in the door? Does your organization offer internships?
37. Who do you know whom I should talk to next in this industry? When I contact him/her, may I use your name?