



INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

One of the best ways to learn about a particular career field is to talk with people in careers you are considering. No one else can give you a better sense of the real life expectations, the challenges/opportunities, and the drawbacks and limitations of the career field.

Benefits of Informational Interviews:

- Discover the “realities” of a particular career field and what is it *really* like to work in a given industry.
- Determine a fit between your personality, interests, skills, and values in relation to a specific occupation.
- Develop confidence in interviewing and meet people in your field in a low risk, non-threatening situation.
- Expand your network of contacts and gain referrals to other contacts for future networking opportunities.
- Find out about career paths you did not know existed.
- Improve your communication skills by talking informally with an interested professional.
- Hear an insider’s opinions of the career field and see the work environment.
- Gain job searching advice from someone in your field.

How to Locate Contacts for Informational Interviews:

- Contact the Career Services Center to identify employers and alumni of Coppin State University.
- Increase your network through people you know formally and informally. Consider the following: parents/siblings, extended family, friends, professors, coaches, advisors, mentors, colleagues, supervisors, neighbors, and contacts from professional organizations.

Informational Interview Topics:

- Work Environment
- Ideal Skill Set/Qualifications
- Industry Trends
- Career Path of Interviewee
- Lifestyle
- Typical Compensation for Entry Level
- Challenges/Rewards
- Career Ladder of Field
- A Day in the Life
- Advancement

Do's and Don'ts for Informational Interviews:

1. **DO assume that most people in responsible positions will be willing to talk with others** who are enthusiastic and interested in them, what they are doing, their job and their organization.
2. **DON'T confuse it with a job interview:** be clear, honest and unambiguous about your motive or agenda, and stick to the agenda of just getting career information, not fishing for a job opening.
3. **DO make an explicit appointment** for a short period of time (20 minutes); be on time, and leave on time.
4. **DON'T ignore the preparation process.** Arrive thoroughly prepared with the questions you want answered. See the list below for sample interview questions.
5. **DO talk about (or demonstrate) your skills:** know what your strengths are; be articulate, she/he cannot help you effectively if you do not explain (or show) what you can do.
6. **DO leave with at least two referrals** to other people in the field that you can talk to in the same way.
7. **DO take down notes immediately** after the interview, recording everything you learned.
8. **DO send a thank you note** right away.
9. **DO keep well-organized records** of your informational interviewing process.

Questions to Ask during the Informational Interview

Education

- What was your undergraduate degree and major? Do you think your choice of major was important to your career path?
- What makes a person most marketable for jobs in this field? For example, should I have certain classes or internships in my background?
- Is it important to pursue a graduate degree to advance in this field? If so, will employers support this pursuit?

Career Information

- What is your position? With whom do you work? What has been your career path?
- What are typical entry-level positions in this field?
- Can you share the career path of someone in ____position? How long does it take to move “up the ladder”?
- What would be the major responsibilities of someone in this position?
- What are the general salary ranges for positions in this field?

Vision for the Field

- In what ways is this field changing or growing?
- What are major issues affecting the field, your position or your organization?
- What are particular advantages and disadvantages of this type of work?
- What have you liked most about your job? What has challenged you most?
- What advice would you give a someone wanting to enter this field?

Questions Professionals Might Ask Students:

- What is your major and why did you choose it? Why did you go to Coppin State University?
- What types of career fields/positions interest you? Why?
- In what extracurricular or community activities do you participate?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- Describe your ideal work environment.
- What projects, volunteer work or internships have you participated in that will help in your career?
- What are your personal goals and ambitions?