

# CAREER CONVERSATION

## (aka The Informational Interview)

An informational interview is an excellent way to explore academic or career pathways simply by talking to someone about what they do. Essentially, you just find someone who is doing the kind of work that you might like to do and ask if they would be willing to answer a few questions about their work, work environment, career path, academic preparation etc.

To be very clear - in an informational interview, you do ***not*** ask for a job. Instead, you are basically asking people to talk about themselves and to give advice . . . and most people love to do those two things!

### Need convincing? Here are just a few great reasons to do an informational interview:

- Learning more about the career/field could help you to decide if it will be a good fit – often, it will confirm your interest but if it doesn't feel like a good fit, that information can be just as useful.
- You could discover other careers/opportunities that you never knew existed!
- Learn more about what skills, qualifications, and preparation are needed (or useful) for the position
- You might learn “insider” information – stuff that only people working in the field know – and that could help you in your job search. It could even help you land a job!
- Networking! Networking! Networking! That might be a little scary for some folks but seriously, networking is one of the best ways to find opportunities... and it doesn't have to be formal or awkward. Usually, networking just means talking to people about what they (and probably you) love to do.

### OK, now that you're convinced, here are the basic steps:

#### Find someone to interview

There are tons of ways to find people to interview but here are some suggestions to get you thinking:

- LinkedIn – join LinkedIn and use the alumni tool to find UW alums; join the “University of Washington Alumni Group” (open to students) and do a keyword search; search beyond the alumni group for more contacts
- Your extended network – you know a ton of people already (family, friends, professors, other students, advisers, etc.) so talk to them to see if they know people in your field
- Faculty, staff, grad students, advisers in your major – these folks will be a particularly good source of info, since they're already working in the field
- Professional organizations & events
- Other social media – LinkedIn is great because it's dedicated to career building but Facebook or Twitter or any other social media outlet could also be a good networking resource
- Use your imagination to come up with other methods!

#### Invite that person to interview

- Now that you've found someone, make note of their position title, email address, and phone number
- Send them a brief email requesting a meeting – be sure to introduce yourself and state the reason for your request
  - EXAMPLE EMAIL:  
*Dear Ms./Mr./Dr. LastName,*  
*I am a junior at the University of Washington majoring in [MAJOR] and am very interested in the field of [CAREER INTEREST]. I received your name from [SOURCE] and thought you would be an excellent person to contact for more information in my field of interest.*  
  
*As a student of [MAJOR], I am enjoying learning about this field but am ready to get a clearer sense of direction and possibilities as I think about my future career. To that end, I would love to get your advice on the career possibilities as well as insight into the day-to-day activities and how to successfully prepare to enter this field.*

*Would you be available for a brief conversation on this topic (20-30 minutes)? I will follow up with a phone call to try to schedule a time at your convenience. [NOTE: Only write this if you have their phone number!]*

*Thank you for your time and consideration!*

*Sincerely,*

*Your FirstName LastName*

- Follow up with a phone call. If you don't reach them initially, wait a week or two and then reach out again – professionals are busy people and they may not always have time to respond the first time around. Always be professional and respectful in your communication – even if they aren't able to chat with you, there's always a chance you'll encounter them again so don't burn bridges!
- In-person interviews are preferable (especially if you can meet at their place of work and get a look around) but phone interviews work just as well, if you can't meet in person.

#### Prepare for the interview

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- Do some research on the field this professional works in so you have a sense of what they do
- Write some questions out ahead of time (but it's ok to go off-script, if new questions occur during your conversation) - some sample questions:
  - How did you get into this field? What are some hurdles you encountered along the way?
  - What is your typical day/week/work shift like?
  - What do you like the most about your work? The least?
  - What skills/qualifications are useful to succeed in this field?
  - What advice would you give someone considering this field?
  - Are there on-the-job opportunities for professional development/ training/continued learning & growth?
  - How do you measure your success in your job?
  - Can you suggest others in the field who might be interested in talking with me?
- Be prepared to talk about yourself – you might be asked to share your interests, goals, strengths, etc.

#### Conduct the interview

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- Be on time! And be respectful of their time – try to wrap it up in 20-30 minutes unless they invite you to chat longer
- Be respectful, professional, polite, engaged
- Ask the questions you've listed but feel free to follow up on topics that might come up in the conversation
- DO ask for information, advice, and contacts. DO NOT ask for a job (or internship)!
- Take notes and use them to follow up and follow through
- Thank them for their time

#### Follow up with a thank-you note

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- ALWAYS send a thank you note or email right away
- Thank them for their time and expertise; ask permission to stay in touch

#### Maintain contact with the person you interviewed

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Follow up occasionally with a brief email update on how you used their advice

#### Reflect on what you learned

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- Did you find the conversation helpful?
- Does the career seem to fit with your strengths, personality, interests, values, goals, etc.?
- Do you have the skill/qualifications/experiences for the field? If not, do you have a plan on developing the skills?
- Were you surprised by anything you learned? What did you find most interesting about the career/field/person?
- Were you given the names of other people in the field to try to connect with? If so, do you have a plan for following up on the referrals?