

OFFICE OF CAREER SERVICES

INTERVIEWS – INFORMATIONAL

Informational interviewing is the best way to get current in-depth information on a field or organization, and it provides an opportunity to network with people who have the power to hire. The best informational interviews come through personal contacts. Contact family, friends, professors, former employers, and ask whether they know anyone in your field of interest and would be willing to facilitate an introduction on your behalf. SIPA's Alumni Community on the SIPA website is a helpful starting point to search for various alumni. Additionally, SIPA's LinkedIn group, *SIPA Alumni and Student Network*, has over 7,200 members and is an excellent source for obtaining informational interview contacts.

SETTING UP AN INTERVIEW

After doing some initial reading, contact potential informational interviewees by telephone, email, or with a letter and follow-up call. Preparation involves three steps: reading about the field/organization, articulating your purpose and interest, and preparing questions to ask. In your first letter, email or phone call, explain that you are not looking for a job, but simply for information as you conduct career research. Explain how you got the person's name, particularly if it is a personal referral. Be prepared to conduct the interview on the spot if your contact insists! After the informational interview, always ask for names of others you might contact. Remember that you are not asking for a job, rather you are looking for four things: information, advice, referrals and to be remembered. Informational interviews are conducted very differently than job interviews – you are leading the interview! Call to confirm your appointment, act and dress professionally, arrive early, and be thoroughly prepared.

ABCs OF INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Act appropriately – Do not ask for a job or internship.

Be professional– **Do not be too casual. You lead the interview, but it may lead you to a job!**

Call or email to confirm your appointment the day before it is scheduled to occur.

Dress for an interview (professional attire required) and bring your resume.

Enthusiastically and promptly send a thank you note via email or mail within 48 hours after your meeting.

Fishing for questions to ask the alum? Try some of the questions below.

EXAMPLE: THE INITIAL EMAIL

Dear Mr./Ms. _____:

My name is _____, and I am a member of the SIPA Alumni and Student Network on LinkedIn. I'm studying energy policy at SIPA, and I noticed that you are associated with the New York City Mayor's Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability. Your professional insights would be very helpful to me as I pursue my studies and career options, and I would like to request a brief information meeting at your convenience.

I will follow up with you on _____ to arrange an appointment that will work within your schedule. My contact information appears below.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,
Student
Student A. Student
(646) 787-7887
studenta.student@columbia.edu

EXAMPLE: THE INITIAL PHONE CALL

Hello, Mr./Ms. _____. This is (*your name*). I'm a SIPA student and I emailed (*day or date*) to introduce myself and request an informational meeting. I'm calling to follow up and see if you might have a time that's convenient for us to meet.

DURING/AFTER THE INTERVIEW

QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- What positions and/or other experiences led you to your current job? What did you do to make yourself marketable?
- Are there any disadvantages to being in this field?
- Is the field growing? If so, in what areas? What are the biggest challenges facing this field?
- What trends would be likely to affect someone just entering this profession? At mid-career?
- What are typical job roles in this profession? Entry Level? Mid-Career? Late Career?
- What are the characteristics and competencies of people who are successful in this field/department/role?
- What specific functional or technical knowledge is critical to this field/department/role?
- What non-academic experiences would help my chances of employment?
- What are the most active hiring companies/organizations? (Ask for referrals, if possible.)
- What are the best resources for locating advertised and unadvertised positions and job leads?
- Are there other people in this field with whom you would suggest I talk?

QUESTIONS TO ANTICIPATE:

- What is my background and how did I become interested in this career field?
- What skills do I have as a result of those experiences?
- Why did I decide to go to SIPA and what do I expect to gain?
- What are my career interests or topics of interest related to this field?

FOLLOW UP:

Before you leave:

- Confirm that you can use the individual's name when contacting referrals.
- Ask if you may keep in touch, leaving the door open for future contact. (You may want to send a note later letting him/her know the results of your informational interviews with his/her referrals.)
- Leave a copy of your resume as a reminder of your interest.

After you leave:

- Send a thank you email within 48 hours. Include your resume as an attachment for your contact's reference.
- Create a log sheet recording the contact information, date of interview, advice, and referrals that you gained. Make this a well-organized record-keeping system – you will want to refer to those notes again!
- Remember to keep in touch with your contacts. They may be of assistance later in your career or vice versa!

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW LOG SHEET

Date of Interview: ____/____/____ Thank You Letter Sent: ____/____/____

Organization: _____ Department: _____

Last Name: _____ First: _____ Middle Initial: _____

Title: _____ Email: _____

Business Address: _____

Business Phone Number: _____ Business Fax: _____

Assistant's Name:

Referred by:

New Referrals:

Can you use his/her name?

General Advice:

Most able to help with:

(Primary Objectives)

May be able to help with:

(Secondary Objectives)

Follow-Up Date: ____/____/____ Re: _____

Their Interests: _____

General Comments: _____