

Informational Interview Preparation

- Review your career goals and the positions you would like to apply for upon graduation. Also consider what types of internships would best prepare you for this role. What types of companies, non-profits or agencies would you apply to?
- Review alumni in Cardinal Station and select the ones who are working in the field you want to pursue. Learn as much as you can ahead of time about the career, as well as the department and the role of the person you are interviewing.
- Prior to the interview, think about what goals you have for this informational interview and write them down. What do you want to learn as a result of this interview? Make certain that these goals are reflected in the questions you will ask (see suggested questions below). One goal should be to establish a relationship with your contact as hopefully you can develop this relationship, then afterwards ask yourself, did I achieve my goals?
- Send the person you intend to interview a short email explaining that you are graduating from high school and preparing to enter college and are considering employment in this area. You would appreciate him/her sharing their experience and response to some questions about their present position, career path and how their college degree prepared them for this role. Provide the questions in advance as this will give alumni time to reflect upon their answers and provide a thoughtful response.
- Always send a thank you note after the interview thanking them for their time and asking them if you can stay in touch with them. This will allow you to develop a relationship with them and ask them further questions as you enroll in college and continue researching this career. Informational interviews are excellent ways to start your professional network.
- It is always wise to extend professional courtesy and ask them if you may take notes during the interview. I would suggest reassuring them that these notes will only be seen by you and will be used in your career decision-making process.
- Think through what you want to say about yourself. Be ready to answer questions about your areas of interests, previous experiences and future plans. If you are unsure about your future career goals, it is alright to say you are exploring your options, but you should be able to identify some general, tentative goals.
- Research the industry of the person you are interviewing. Ask thoughtful questions that are not easily found on the internet. Review sample informational interviewing questions.
- Most people don't mind if you take notes, thus, if you do, I suggest creating a framework for your reflection afterwards. This reflection should include a heading ("Interview with _____"), a list of your strengths (writing, communication, research, etc.) and weaknesses (math) and include potential areas of career interest. Start writing your reflection by first noting the most important things you learned from your interview. Include subheadings for at least three important parts you learned from your interview such as aspects of the career that were discussed which you did or didn't like, new requirements you learned are suggested or required for this career, important pieces of advice that were shared, etc.). Then create a heading "Personal conclusions from the interview." Note why this area still seems like a good fit for a career path and whether you need more information. If it's not a good fit, then state as clearly as you can, why you don't feel comfortable pursuing it.

Possible Questions for an Informational Interview:

1. What attracted you to this profession? How did you get your start in this field?
2. Describe your career progression.
3. Tell me about your journey to this company and position. What degrees do you hold? How did your college education and professional experience prepare you for this role?
4. What attracted you to this career field?
5. What is the culture like here?
6. What excites you about coming to work every day?
7. What types of projects are typical for a work week?
8. What is a typical day like for you?
9. What do you enjoy most about your work?
10. What's the most challenging aspect of your profession and how do you cope with them or prepare for them?
11. How do you handle stress or tight deadlines?
12. How have you advanced within your organization? What skills that you developed in your other roles help you advance (developing relationships with colleagues, working in teams, subject matter expertise, etc.)?
13. Have you seen a lot of change in your industry in the past 5 years? How has your role changed because of this?
14. Do you have an opportunity to work with other departments on projects? If so, what skills or expertise are important for cross-functional projects? What skills do you look for in employees who are asked to complete cross functional projects? What would you suggest are the most important skills or knowledge for a person like me to develop as I begin college that would prepare me for these cross functional roles?
15. What advice do you have for someone like me who will be graduating and preparing to enter the workforce or applying for internships?

Professional Development

16. Can you recommend any professional publications that will prepare me for a role in this profession or a place where I could learn more about internships or jobs that are available?
17. Do you have any podcasts or blogs that you follow?
18. Can you recommend how I can best prepare for an internship in this field? Are there classes I should take? Can you recommend any extracurricular activities that may help me advance? What skills should I develop as I prepare to enter the workforce?

Closing Questions – Preparation for entering the workforce:

19. What changes do you anticipate in your industry in the next 10 years? How would you suggest that I best prepare for these changes as I begin college? Are there any courses, skills, or internships you would suggest that would prepare me for future changes in this profession?

Questions to avoid:

- Be professional and focus on the questions you have provided
- Do not ask for a job or internship
- Never ask them a question about their salary

- Avoid asking any personal questions

Debrief afterwards: Reflection

It is best to answer these questions immediately after the interview while the interview is fresh in your mind.

- What did you learn?
- What are the career pathways? What are the requirements?
- What skills are most important to advance in this field? How can I develop those skills in the time I have here? What clubs could I join? What projects could I participate in these clubs? What skills would I develop?
- What are the biggest challenges and changes this industry faces? What skills and knowledge can you learn now to make you a more competitive candidate in the future?
- What did you learn about coping mechanisms for stress and challenges?
- What aspects do you think you will like/dislike about this profession?