



## Informational interviewing

### Use informational interviewing to manage your career at Cornell

It provides a way for you to:

- Learn about the mission and goals of a school, department, lab or center.
- Understand how your interests and transferrable skills align with Cornell's organizational needs.
- Obtain career field information regarding preparation, experience needed and growth potential.
- Expand your possibilities by learning about job roles, projects or work environments that you may not have considered.
- Narrow your options by determining your priorities and the best fit with your talents.
- Gain knowledge about critical skills or knowledge needed for the future.
- Get advice on your development plan or future job search strategy.
- Learn more about how others have made transitions at various stages.

### Set up an informational interview

You can phone or email a person directly to set up the informational interview. Meeting with someone in person is more effective than a phone call or email exchange. People are more likely to share referrals from their network if they have met you in person.

#### Call

- Introduce yourself and explain how you got their name.
- Ask them if they have a few minutes to talk to you, if not ask them when would be a better time.
- Tell them that you are researching a specific field or career and are in search of information and advice and reassure them that you are not looking for a job – rather exploring career options.
- Set up a mutually satisfying time for you to meet in person.

### Send an email or write a letter

- Describe your experiences and goals in an email. It is best not to enclose your resume as it will look like you are looking for a job when that should not be your objective.
- Explain that you would like to meet for an informational interview because you are researching a specific field or career.

### Prepare for the interview

- Do your homework to learn about the department through the web, annual reports, etc. and the individual you are interviewing.
- Review Sample Informational Interviewing Questions (below)
- Prepare the questions you want to ask.

### Conduct the interview

- Reiterate your reasons for meeting with this person.
- Relax! You don't have to be nervous – this isn't a job interview.
- Ask open-ended questions that demonstrate you have done your homework.
- Take notes.

- Don't ask for a job!
- Get the names of others to contact.
- Honor the time the interviewee has scheduled.

## Follow up

- Remember to send a thank-you card or by email.
- Evaluate the information you received.
- Maintain your connections – send an email message updating your contacts with your progress.
- Keep good notes to use later (include dates, names, addresses, etc.).
- Use and maintain the contact record.

## Sample informational interviewing: questions to ask

Prior to your informational interview, you may wish to prepare a list of questions to help guide your conversation. Think about the information that you'd most like to find out about the organization, the particular career field, or the person. Remember to ask open-ended questions to encourage and facilitate a fruitful conversation.

Following is a list of sample questions you may choose to ask during your interview. These questions represent different levels of inquiry. Develop your questions based on your overall goals and what you are most interested in learning. The intent of informational research is to understand how your interests, skills and values align with the goals and tasks of an organization, department, or career field.

### Organization/Department

These questions focus on the overall mission, function and structure of the department or organization. The goal is to understand how work is organized and the key skills and knowledge that are needed for the organization to accomplish its objectives.

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### Questions about department trends

- How would describe the overall mission and goals of your organization?
- What are the challenges facing the department?
- What are the key strategic initiatives?
- What priority projects or services have been identified?
- What are the core activities, and services of this department?
- How would you describe internal or external clients? What is important to them?
- Where do you see growth or change occurring in the organization?

### Questions about job roles

- What skills and knowledge are most critical in this organization?
- What personal characteristics do you feel contribute most to success in this department?
- What are some typical job roles in this department? Entry? Mid-Level? Senior roles?
- What job roles would utilize skills in (e.g. marketing, presentation, data analysis, negotiating)?
- What do you see the opportunities for growth and development?

### Questions about structure and culture

- What is the management style in this organization?
- How are decisions made? Do people feel included in the process?
- What is a typical day like?
- What are normal work hours?
- Do people work long hours? Is there flexibility? Do people take vacations?
- How does your use of time vary? Are there busy and slow times or is the work activity fairly constant?
- How would you describe the pace and cycle of work in this area?
- Are the time demands of your job specific to this department, or would anyone in this career be expected to work similar

hours?

- What factors would most improve your capacity to provide quality service to your organization?

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## Career field and profession

These questions concentrate on gaining an overview of a specific career field or profession. The goal is to understand job roles, tasks, and the experiences, education and development needed to be successful.

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## Questions about career path and occupational outlook

- What are typical job roles available in this profession? Entry? Mid-Career? Late Career?
- What are typical career paths in this field?
- What experiences, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field?
- What did you do to make yourself marketable?
- What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?
- Is the field growing? If so, in what areas? What are the biggest challenges facing this field?
- What trends would likely to affect someone just entering this profession? At mid-career?
- How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?
- What changes in demand have you seen in the profession?
- Where do you see the growth opportunities for the profession?
- How can I learn more about the field (e.g., journal, publications, professional associations, workshops, seminars, conferences, etc.)?
- What special advice would give a person entering this field? At mid-career? Late career?
- What do you wish you had known about this field or organization before you entered it?

## Questions about success factors

- What are the characteristics and competencies of people who are successful in this field?
- What does it take to be successful in this type of career?
- What does it take, in your view, to succeed in this field, department, division, role?
- What type of person is best suited to the work in this area?
- What specific functional or technical knowledge is critical to this work? Education, Training & Skills
- What are the basic prerequisites for jobs in this field?
- What particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in this job?
- How did you learn these skills?
- What are the educational requirements for this position or field? Is graduate school recommended/ required?
- What personal qualities or abilities are important for success (in this field, organization, or position)?
- What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
- What kind of background or training is desirable for this work? Are there certain classes or training programs you would recommend?
- What degree or certification do employers look for?

## Questions about compensation

- What are the typical salary ranges in this profession? Entry? Mid-level? Senior level?
- Aside from such tangible compensation as money, fringe benefits, travel, etc., what kinds of satisfaction and reward does this profession yield?

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## Person and Position

These questions zero-in on the specific experiences of the person being interviewed. This approach provides an opportunity to learn about an individual's career choices, preferences, and reactions to different kinds of work.

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## Questions about the interviewee

- What is your background (both academic and experience)?
- How did your background lead you to this position?
- How did you become interested in this type of work and how did you get your present job?
- How long have you worked in this field?
- What is the most challenging/rewarding aspect of your work/career?

## Questions about job characteristics

- How would you describe your day-to-day responsibilities?
- What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of this job role?
- What is unique about your job as compared with others, which are similar?
- Approximately what percentage of time is spent on each type of job responsibility?
- What kinds of problems and challenges do you face this role?
- What constraints, such as time and funding, make the job more challenging?
- What kinds of decisions do you make?
- Describe some of the toughest situations you've faced in this job.
- To what extent do you interact with customers/clients?
- With which other departments, functional units, or levels of the hierarchy do you regularly interact? ▲ How much flexibility do you have in determining how you perform your job?
- Can you manage your own workflow, or does the nature of your work dictate the pace?
- Do you work individually or predominantly in groups or teams?
- How are work teams or groups organized?
- What part of this job do you personally find most satisfying? Most challenging? Least satisfying? ▲
- Is multi-tasking a skill that is required for this job?
- What projects have you worked on that have been particularly interesting?

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## Closing: referral or suggestions

- Are there other departments or organizations that you would recommend as part of my research?
  - Can you suggest others that I might contact? May I use your name?
  - Based on my interests, are there professional organizations you would recommend?
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