Informational Interviewing Guide

Essential resources for long-term career planning
What is Informational Interviewing?

Informational interviewing is a very effective tool used for career exploration. It literally means that YOU interview someone to gather information that will help you choose a career, refine your career path, or break into your chosen field.

How will you benefit?

By using this strategy you will:

- Gather information about careers
- Clarify your career goals
- Expand your professional network
- Build confidence for job interviews
- Access up-to-date career information
- Learn more about work environments
- Get advice about job search strategies
- Discover new jobs and internships

Who should you interview?

First, identify what you want out of the interview. Do you want to:

- Uncover career options for your major? Talk to Bates graduates with the same major.
- Learn more about a certain career path? Interview Bates alumni in that occupation.
- Network with professionals at a specific company or city? Research contacts there.

Second, consider your network. Think of:

- Friends, parents, other family members
- Friends of your family or family of your friends
- Professors, teachers, and past employers
- Professionals you admire
- Bates alumni listed in the Bates Online Community

How to Ask

You can call, email, or write to your contact. The most effective strategy is to send an email or a letter at first, and then follow up with a phone call.

- Always introduce yourself
- Explain your situation - “I’m on a career search” or “I am investigating career paths.”
- Describe your connection to the contact – “I’m a current student at Bates College and I understand you are a graduate of Bates” or “I’m a friend of Mary’s.”
- Explain what you are seeking – “I’m seeking information and advice about your industry.”

TIPS

- Remember, people like to share!
- Ask for facts and advice, not a job.
- Be sincere in your request for information.
- Think of yourself five years from now – wouldn’t you like to help a fellow Batesie?
Prepare for the Informational Interview

- Research the company online
- Prepare questions (see below)
- Plan your outfit and appearance
- Print a copy of your resume
- Confirm the meeting
- Plan how to get there

During the Interview

- Be professional
- Exude enthusiasm
- Stay focused
- Listen
- Create a dialogue
- Share information
- Take notes
- Manage the time

Informational Interview Questions

Prepare a list ahead of time that includes the questions that are most interesting and helpful for you. For a typical 30 minute informational interview, choose 10-12 questions to ask.

ABOUT HIS/HER BACKGROUND

- Can you tell me about your background and career path?
- How did you get started in this type of work?
- Why does this type of work interest you?
- What do you like best about your career/job/employer?
- How did you get your job?
- How well did your college experience prepare you for this job?

ABOUT THE JOB

- What do you do? What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?
- Can you describe a typical day or week on the job?

ABOUT THE COMPANY

- Why did you decide to work for this company?
- How does your company differ from its competitors?
- What kind of future do you see for this organization?
- What can you tell me about the corporate culture?
ABOUT THE OCCUPATION

- What skills/abilities are utilized in this occupation?
- What types of employers hire people in this occupation?
- What other career areas do you feel are related to this work?
- What is the salary range for various levels in this field?
- Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?

ABOUT THE INDUSTRY

- What trends do you see for this industry in the next 3 to 5 years?
- How much of your business is tied to (the economy, government spending, supplies, etc.)?
- How is the economy affecting this industry?
- What can you tell me about the employment outlook in this industry?

ABOUT THE CAREER PATH

- What is a typical career path in this field or organization?
- What are your long term goals?
- If your job progresses as you would like, what would be the next step in your career?
- If your work were suddenly eliminated, what kinds of work do you feel prepared to do?

HOW TO ENTER THE OCCUPATION/INDUSTRY

- What is the best way to enter this occupation? What are the typical entry-level job titles?
- What salary level would a new person start with? Are there other forms of compensation?
- How important are grades/GPA for obtaining a job in this field?

HOW TO GET A JOB

- How do people find out about jobs in this field? How are jobs advertised?
- Who makes the hiring decisions for your department?
- When I am ready to apply for a job, who should I contact?

ADVICE

- Do you have any advice for someone interested in this field?
- Considering what you know about my skills and education, where might I fit in this field?
- What experience, paid or volunteer, would you recommend?
- What other careers would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?

REFERRALS/NEXT STEPS

- Based on our conversation today, what other people do you believe I should talk to? May I have permission to use your name when I contact them?
After the Interview

- Analyze and evaluate the information you gathered – what else do you need to learn?
- What would you do differently next time you do an informational interview?
- Follow through on your next steps – what commitments did you make?
- Contact referrals – who else do you plan to interview?
- Very important: SEND A THANK YOU NOTE! Send a hand-written note or email thanking your contact for his/her time and mentioning something specific that was particularly helpful.
- Beyond that, consider staying in touch by sending an update to your contacts when you land your new job!