

# INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

An informational interview is a meeting initiated by you. It involves connecting with individuals in fields of interest and gathering information about those fields that may help you make some valuable career-related decisions. You are the one conducting the interview, so you need to be prepared! The purpose of the informational interview is **NOT** to ask for a job!!! It is to gather information and expand your network.

## BENEFITS

- Help you gain confidence in interviewing skills and become more comfortable with interviewing.
- Discover skills required for the career field and match them with your abilities, strengths, and interests.
- Serve as a method to gather information about a specific organization or investigate a specific job.
- Develop valuable networking leads that may help you identify future opportunities.

## EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE

- Before sending emails, review content carefully for grammatical and/or typographical errors.
- Use an easily identifiable subject line in all email correspondence. For example: “Shippensburg University student requesting assistance/advice in \_\_\_\_\_”
- Be formal and complete in all correspondence. Avoid using slang/abbreviations that you may normally use when corresponding with friends through chat rooms and instant messaging. Using “Hey”, “LOL”, and smiley faces are not acceptable ways to address professionals you have never met.
- Always address the person as Dear Mr./Ms. Smith.

## TELEPHONE CORRESPONDENCE

- Before calling an employer, take the time to get organized.
- Prepare a “script” or opening of what you want to say. Also, prepare a “script” for situations that will require you to leave a message.
- Write down questions to ask the individual during your telephone conversation.
- If appropriate, ask if it is possible to arrange a time to meet.
- If leaving a voice mail, be professional and courteous. Always provide them with a telephone number to contact you, and if possible, the best times to reach you.
- Speak clearly and slowly. Leave your name at the beginning **and** end of the message.
- Repeat your phone number twice at the end of the message. Include the area code to avoid any confusion

## POSSIBLE OPENINGS FOR EMAILS/TELEPHONE MESSAGES:

- My name is Joan Smith and I am a sophomore marketing major at Shippensburg University. I received your information from (faculty, staff name) and was hoping you would be able to provide me with some additional insight related to employment opportunities in the marketing field.
- My name is Matt Johnson and I am a junior mathematics major at Shippensburg University. I received your information from (faculty, staff name). I am an active member of the Mathematics Club on campus and we are seeking an employer who would be interesting in serving as a guest speaker at one of our upcoming meetings to talk about career opportunities in mathematics for those with bachelor degrees.
- Hello, Ms. Jefferson. I received your contact information from (faculty, staff member) at Shippensburg University. As a junior Sociology major, I have always been extremely interested in beginning my career with the Peace Corps. With your background in this area, I was hoping you could provide me with some additional insight into the application process and share some ideas/suggestions that will help me increase my chances of getting accepted into the Peace Corps.

## **ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS**

- Emphasize that you are not asking for a job.
- If you are meeting in person, dress professionally (wear a suit) and bring copies of your resume to the interview.
- Keep the interview to 20-30 minutes. However, don't be surprised if the interview lasts longer; people like to talk about themselves and want to be helpful.
- Consider contacting multiple individuals to arrange informational interviews. This will increase the likelihood of gathering useful information and making meaningful connections.
- Have prepared questions to ask so you are prepared to initiate conversation with the individual.
- Compile a notebook or file with questions and responses for each informational interview.
- Create a file containing names, job titles, and contact information for all individuals with whom you conduct an informational interview.
- Be patient. These individuals are voluntarily agreeing to assist you – they have work duties/responsibilities outside of responding to your phone calls or emails.
- Be courteous and professional at all times. Don't be "pushy" or demanding in your correspondence. (These individuals do not "owe" you anything.) Professional, polite correspondence always achieves more positive results.
- Always ask for referrals. Who else do they recommend you contact in the field in order for you to gather more information.
- Always follow-up with an appropriate "Thank You!" Let the person know you appreciate the time they are taking to provide you with assistance/information.
- For additional suggestions on how to professionally connect with employers, please contact the Career Development Center at 717-477-1484. We would be more than happy to review your proposed email or phone "script" before you send it to the appropriate individual(s).

## **POSSIBLE QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS**

- Tell me about your present position and some of your major responsibilities.
- Describe a typical work week for you.
- What skills or talents are most essential in this field?
- What are the biggest challenges you face in this position?
- What do you find most rewarding about this position?
- What credentials, degrees, majors/minors, etc. will help make me marketable in this field?
- How did you prepare yourself for this work?
- What kinds of experiences (paid and unpaid) would you strongly recommend in order to gain experience in this field?
- What academic courses would be most beneficial for students pursuing this field today?
- What obligations does this position place upon you outside of the typical work week?
- Describe the flexibility in terms of dress, work hours, vacation schedule, and geographic residence.
- What employers hire people in your line of work? Where are they located?
- What is the best way to find out about internship and job opportunities?
- What does staff turnover look like? Is this typical for this company? This industry?
- What is a typical salary range for entry level positions in this field?
- What factors are most important in interviewing and hiring for internships and full time positions?
- What opportunities are there for professional development and advancement?
- If your position was suddenly eliminated, what different kinds of work do you believe you could do?
- What is the career growth in this field?
- Who else could you recommend I speak with to gather more information about this field of work? May I use your name when I contact them?