What is an Informational Interview?

- An informational interview is a great way to gather first-hand information about an occupation or a field you’d like to know more about.
- Talking with someone who has knowledge of the field, or is already working in the profession, can be helpful in obtaining up-to-date information.
- The information you obtain can also assist you in making a more informed decision about the type of education you need for the career you are considering.
- Career Center staff can help you identify occupations and/or fields you may wish to explore. We can help you relate your major to different areas of interest; assist you in the process of deciding on a major or career field; and, help you identify potential people to interview.

The Benefits of Informational Interviewing

- Gather up-to-date, first-hand information and perceptions to help you evaluate personal goals and career paths.
- Discover what is done on a daily basis by someone in the field; relate your individual skills and personal qualities to the functions performed.
- Discover how people feel about their work and relate this information to your individual values and skills.
- Test your assumptions and expectations against the reality of what you are seeing and hearing.
- Make contacts for future reference.
- Become well informed about trends in the field.
- Meet with potential employers in a non-stressful situation.
- Develop self-confidence and make an informed career decision.

Getting Started

- Brainstorming
  Devote some quality time to “brainstorming” people you already know on campus or in the community: faculty, friends, co-workers, family members and their connections. You may also consider speakers you have heard, people in the news, or past employers.

- Yellow Pages/Other Directories
  Identify companies or organizations in the areas employing people doing work that interests you. Use the yellow pages, business journals, annual reports, Internet sites, Chambers of Commerce, and other reference guides that detail business and professions. Career Center staff can help you with this type of research.

- Notebook
  Keep a notebook of the names of potential people to interview, their contact information, details of conversations, additional resources, and referrals.

Arranging the Interview

- Contacting the Person
  Call the contact person directly and explain you are gathering information regarding a particular career field. Ask for thirty minutes or less, and be courteous. You might say:
  “Hello, my name is [your name]. I’m a junior at California State University, Sacramento, majoring in [your major]. I am in the process of researching and exploring the [field] field. At this point in my research, I am interested in speaking with someone currently employed in the field. Would it be possible to meet with you to ask you some questions about the [field] field? Or, is there someone else that you would recommend I talk to?”
Arranging the Interview continued
* Preparation
Prepare for the informational interview by jotting down specific questions in advance of the interview. Remember to include the individual’s name, title, and company/organization, address, office number, and phone number.

Conducting the Interview
* Be on time! Take notes and consider asking some of the following types of questions:
  - What is a typical day like in your line of work?
  - How did you get started in this field?
  - What is your specific background and experience?
  - What entry-level jobs are best for learning as much as possible in this field?
  - What skills must someone absolutely have to succeed in this field?
  - What is the typical career path for advancement?
  - What do you like best about your work? Least?
  - How many hours a week do you usually work?
  - Can you describe your working environment?
  - What are the obligations outside of work?
  - What salary can someone expect at entry level?
  - What types of changes do you see occurring in this field?
  - What is the employment outlook in this field for the next ten years?
  - As you look back on your first few years after college, what would you do differently?
  - What other occupations are closely related to this one?
  - Are there other people you suggest I should talk with?
  - What general advice would you have for someone considering this field of work?

* At the end of the interview, ask them for their business card.

After the Interview
* To get the full benefit from your informational interview experience, take a few minutes to reflect on your impressions of the visit. Ask yourself the following questions:
  - What did I find most interesting about my experience?
  - What new information about the field or occupation did I learn?
  - How does what I learned today relate to my values, skill preferences, and interests?
  - How does what I learned relate to my education and/or career goals?
  - What was the most significant information that I learned about this field?
  - What new positive impressions do I have about this field of work?
  - What new negative impressions do I have about this field of work?
  - What special skills and qualifications do I already have to contribute to this profession?
  - What additional skills and qualifications do I need in order to enter this field?
  - What information do I still need and how can I acquire it?

* You may want to record your answers to the questions above in writing to assist you in future educational and/or career decisions.

* Use the person’s business card and contact information to send a brief “Thank You” letter to them. They are now a part of your network. It is important to acknowledge their part in helping you to make an informed decision.