



Career Development Center's Guide to Informational Interviewing

One strategy that can be particularly helpful in terms of learning about majors and career fields is "*informational* interviewing." The primary purpose of this conversation is to gather information, *not* to get a job. By talking with people who are already in a major, or who are working in your career field of interest, you can gain "insider's" knowledge and understanding as to what a particular major or career field entails. In addition, you will hopefully have engaged in a relationship with someone who can assist you with future decision-making and networking. An excellent resource to utilize in identifying individuals to contact is the Hawk Career Network on LinkedIn or the SJU Connects platform. To learn how to access these resources, please visit the Networking section of our website. Your career counselor can also help you to identify and contact appropriate people with whom to conduct an informational interview, as well as to develop questions you may wish to ask.

Arranging an Informational Interview

Informational Interviewing – About Majors

If you wish to learn more about a potential major, a professor who teaches in the department can serve as an excellent resource. Prior to meeting with the professor, it is strongly recommended that you familiarize yourself with as much information as possible about the major, including the curriculum (i.e., required courses, elective courses, concentrations if applicable) and the faculty. The department's website serves as an excellent resource in this regard. As you review information on the department's website, ask yourself what specifically interests you about the major, why you would expect to do well in this course of study and which courses (and how many) genuinely appeal to you.

Doing this preliminary research and evaluation in advance of the meeting will allow you more time to ask questions whose answers are not readily available online and to spend your time – as well as the professor's – more efficiently.

Appropriate Questions for an Informational Interview – Majors

- What are the skills I will need to possess or develop to be successful in the study of this major?
- Is it possible to double major or complete a minor?
- Does this major allow for internships, co-op or study abroad? If so, what are the requirements?
- What are examples of careers pursued by SJU graduates with this major?
- Can you recommend current students majoring in the department whom I might contact for further information?

Informational Interviewing – About Careers

If you wish to conduct an informational interview to learn more about a career field, send a formal written request to the person with whom you want to speak. In your message, explain why you want to meet with him/her and the information you are hoping to learn. Try to schedule a meeting in his/her workplace. You can learn more about the work environment and the organization's culture through being there. *Be clear that you are seeking career information, not job offers.* Ask friends, professors, family members, past employers, alumni and the Career Development Center to suggest individuals who may provide valuable information relating to your interests.

Appropriate Questions for an Informational Interview – Careers

- How did you choose this career field? ...get started in this job?
- How did you prepare yourself for this job? ...this profession?
- What classes or projects can I do to prepare myself for this career field?
- What is the most valuable thing you learned in college?
- Is there a typical career path that most people follow in your line of work? If so, what is it?
- Knowing what you know now, would you take the same job again? ...Why or why not?
- What do you like most/ least about your job?
- What skills and/or personal qualities are necessary to succeed in this career?
- What do you do in a typical day?
- What type of people do you work with?
- What kinds of internships are available in this type of organization?
- What are the typical entry-level jobs available to college graduates within this field?
- What are the major goals your organization tries to accomplish?
- Would you advise people to enter this career field? ...why or why not?
- What, in your opinion, is the job outlook in this career field?
- What forces typically effect this career field's growth or decline?
- What are some related positions/organizations a person interested in this field might explore?
- Are you a member of any professional associations that you have found useful?
- Who else do you know that I might talk with about this career field? May I use your name in contacting this person?

Regardless of whether you are speaking with a professor to learn more about a major or discussing your interest in a potential career path with an alumni or other professional, it is important to make a positive impression. Here are some tips to help you do so:

- Dress in a professional manner.
- Keep the interview brief and to the point. Do not chitchat.
- Before you begin the interview, inform your host of the questions you will ask so they can gauge their responses accordingly, as well as allow enough time for your meeting.
- Do not ask general questions about information you can easily find in a library or on the internet, as this is not the best use of the person's time.
- Always maintain eye contact, smile, and nod occasionally to indicate your interest in what they are saying.
- Take notes if you wish, but do not write everything; rather note key phrases to remind you of the answer or information.
- Feel free to answer questions about yourself if you are asked, or to intersperse some information about yourself.
- Do not forget to ask for names of other contacts. This should always be the last question you ask; in this manner you will be able to expand your network.
- Thank the person for his/her time.
- Write a thank you note describing what was of value to you.

There are many other ways to learn about careers in addition to the abovementioned strategies. The Career Development Center offers Career Fairs, Networking Nights and Career Panels, and other related events that can also provide excellent opportunities for you to meet professionals in your career fields of interest. Please refer to the Upcoming Events section of our website for the most up-to-date programming schedule.