

Informational Interviewing

Connecting with Professionals Working in a Field of Interest

One of the best ways to learn about career and potential job prospects is to talk with individuals currently working in that field. This is called "informational interviewing." An informational interview may be conducted in person or via phone to help you gain knowledge about a field of choice. There are many options available for using your Ph.D. to make a contribution. You can go into basic research at an institution like Michigan, or you can choose a smaller institution primarily known for its teaching, or you may wish to investigate job alternatives. Whether you are still exploring and want to learn more basic information about a career path, or if you have decided on one and you are looking for tips on how to find the best jobs in that path--an informational interview is a fantastic resource.

Samples of information interview questions:

Below are some sample questions you can use in an informational interview. Keep in mind that an informational interview is designed to help you learn more, so *ask about what's important to you.*

General Question: How did you begin on this career path?

Forms it may take:

1. How did you get started?
2. What things did you do before you entered this line of work? Which have been most helpful?
3. What are the most important personal satisfactions and dissatisfactions connected with your occupation? What part of this job do you find most satisfying? Most challenging? What do you like and not like about working in your job?
4. How did you get your job? What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
5. Why did you decide to work for this organization or institution?
6. What interests you least about the job or creates the most stress?
7. If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path? Why? What would you change?

General Question: What is your job like?

Forms it may take:

1. What do you do? What are the duties/functions/responsibilities of your job?
2. Could you describe a typical day?
3. What kinds of problems do you deal with?
4. What kinds of decisions do you make?
5. What percentage of your time is spent doing what?
6. Are there busy and slow times or is the work activity fairly constant?

General Question: Could you tell me about your organization or institution?

Forms it may take:

1. What do you like most?
2. Who are your competitors?
3. How does your organization or institution differ from its competitors?
4. Who evaluates your performance?
5. Are you optimistic about the future of the organization or institution, and your future in it?
6. What does the organization/institution do to contribute to its employees' professional development?

General Question: Could you tell me about this field or occupation?

Forms it may take:

1. What does the future bring for your job or institution?
2. How does a person progress in your field? What is a typical career path in this institution or company?
3. What is the best way to enter this occupation?
4. Are there opportunities to move into different areas within the organization or institution?
5. What are the advancement opportunities?
6. What are the major qualifications for success?
7. If your job progresses as you like, what would be the next step in your career?

General Question: What leads to success in your job?

Forms it may take:

1. What are the skills that are most important for a position in this field?
2. What particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in your job? How did you learn these skills? Did you enter this position through a formal training program?
3. How well did graduate school or your post-doctoral position prepare you for this job?
4. What prior work or experience has proven to be the most valuable to you in your job? What would you recommend for me?

General Question: Could you tell me about the culture of your organization or institution?

Forms it may take:

1. How would you describe the working atmosphere and the people with whom you work?
2. Is there a basic philosophy of the organization or institution and, if so, what is it?
3. What can you tell me about the culture where you work?
4. What is the average length of time for an employee to stay in the job you hold? Are there incentives or disincentives for staying in the same job?
5. What work-related values are strongest in this type of work (security, high income, variety, independence)?

General Question: Would you be willing to share your professional opinion on my career accomplishments to date?

Forms it may take:

1. How would you assess the experience I've had so far in terms of entering this field?
2. Would you mind taking a look at my C.V.? [If you feel comfortable asking and it seems appropriate]
3. With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other options would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?

General Question: What is the job outlook for this type of position?

Forms it may take:

1. How does the economy affect your job?
2. What can you tell me about the employment outlook in your field?
3. What areas of research do you think are the hottest in the future?
4. What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field? Is there a salary ceiling?
5. What are the typical job titles and functions that are growing?

General Question: Are there other professionals or even written materials you could refer me to that would assist me further in my career exploration?

Forms it may take:

1. Who else do you know who is doing similar kinds of work or uses similar skills?
2. What other kinds of institutions or companies hire people to perform the functions you do here?
3. Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?
4. How did you learn about this particular position/institution/company?
5. What resources you would recommend as I search for a job in this area?

Questions adapted from: www.quintcareers.com/information_interview.html