**What is an informational interview?**

The ultimate networking technique that offers valuable career information is the informational interview. Unlike a job interview, informational interviews are meetings that are requested and run by you. During an informational interview you will gather information on a range of topics including career paths, industry trends, and the corporate culture of a potential employer. It’s important to remember that the *purpose of informational interviewing is to exchange information* -- not to get job offers.

**What are the benefits of an informational interview?**

**Make an informed career decision.** The professional can give you the ‘inside scoop’ about what the field is really like and provide helpful insider tips you might not otherwise get. The information you get can help you decide whether you would want a career in that field or not.

**Expand Your Network.** As you get in front of people who can offer advice in a particular career field or industry, it can lead to more information and contacts that may lead to a job.

**Prepare for Job Interviews.** In addition to developing field and industry expertise you will learn about how to sell your skills and be more comfortable and confident in situations with industry professionals.

**Get Access to the Hidden Job Market** - Not all jobs are advertised--but the professionals you are meeting with may be knowledgeable about current or future job openings at their company or at another company. So even though you aren’t asking for a job, the thought may occur to the person you’re interviewing if you come across as professional, capable, and a good fit for the company.
Who do I conduct an informational interview with?
Informational interviews can be done with people in your network, people you are referred to through your network or by reaching out directly to employees in companies or careers you are interested in. A great tip is to start with people you know well. This can be family, friends, professors or former and current colleagues. You can also tap into fellow alumni by either searching on LinkedIn alumni or by joining the St. John’s Career Connect group on LinkedIn.

Where do you conduct an informational interview?
Ideally, you want to meet in person, because a face-to-face meeting will give the interviewer the best chance for getting to know you. Informational interviews can also be conducted through a 20 minute phone conversation or by email through a question and answer exchange. It’s a good idea to provide the person you would like to meet with a few options for meeting.

How do I request and informational interview?
You can request an informational interview via phone or email. Be sure to share your 30 second pitch and why you’re interested in their company and/or why you want to meet that person.

Dear Mr. Smith,
I am a sophomore at St. John’s University pursuing a BS in Finance with the goal of becoming a Financial Analyst. I located you on the St. John’s University Career Connect group. I would like to schedule a 15-20 minute conversation to learn about your career in the finance industry and your experience at JP Morgan. My coursework and internship at Capital One provided me with a solid foundation and I am interested in your perspective on the opportunities I should consider to best position myself as a strong candidate with robust practical experience upon graduation.
I look forward to our conversation.
Sincerely,
Michael
How do I prepare for an informational interview?
Preparation for an informational interview is the same as preparation for an interview. Prior to the interview research the following:
- company
- industry
- profession
- person’s background
- Prepare elevator pitch
- Prepare questions

What questions do I ask on an informational interview?
Below are sample questions to ask on an informational interview.

- What’s a typical day like as an X?
- What led you to pursue this career?
- What’s been the biggest surprise in your career?
- What do you enjoy most? Least?
- How is the field changing?
- What advice would you provide someone entering this field?
- What types of courses or activities, experiences or coursework can make me more marketable?
- What skills are necessary for success?
- What other companies would you recommend that I speak to?
- What associations/organizations would help me learn more about this field?
How do you conduct an informational interview?

Like a job interview, your goal is to relax and be yourself. Focus on enjoying the opportunity to learn from someone who has great experience and is happy to share this experience with you. Below is an agenda for leading a 20 minute informational interview.

Step 1: Great First Impression (2-3 minutes) – Start with a sincere thank you for the person’s time and expertise. If you were referred, briefly exchange pleasantries about how you came to know the same person. Then provide some background about yourself—your 30 second pitch. Be enthusiastic and articulate about your background and why you are excited to have the opportunity to speak with the person.

Step 2: Agenda for Meeting (1 minute) – Provide a brief overview of the topics you would like to cover.

Step 3: Great Discussion (12-15 minutes) - Ask questions. Questions 1-3 Ask about person’s career, job, company. Question 4: Is there anyone else I should speak to? This is a great question to expand your network. Keep in mind that when a person refers you to someone, his reputation is on the line. Question 5: How can I help you? Networking is about a mutually beneficial exchange. Offer to assist and if you are unsure how you can help, simply ask.

Step 4: Great Ending (1 minute) - Recap what you and your contact will do; show gratitude.

Step 5: Great Follow-up - Send a thank you within 24 hours to make sure the person knows how much you appreciated his time. Personalize your note by sharing what you learned from your conversation. Stay in touch every 6-8 weeks. Keep the person in the loop after you meet with one of his referrals or after you have the job. Remember that by meeting with you, the person invested in you and it will be interesting for him to learn how his investment paid off.

Informational interviews provide a wealth of invaluable career connections and information. More importantly you will gain invaluable experience honing your interview skills so that when a real job interview comes up, you’ll be prepared to ace it.