

A Student Guide to Informational Interviews – 2019-2020

Who?

Are you unsure what career you want to pursue? Or, do you think you know, but want to be sure?

Do you want advice from professionals so you have a better shot at getting an internship, research position or job?

Then Informational Interviews are for YOU!

What?

Informational interviews are the opposite of traditional interviews. Instead of you being interviewed, you interview a professional about their career path and what advice they have for you. This conversation should be requested and led by you (see steps below) and last no more than 30 minutes. *Note: Informational interviews should only be used to ask professionals for INSIGHT and ADVICE, not for a job/internship.*



When?

The sooner, the better! The Office of Internship and Career Development at Agnes Scott encourages students to begin informational interviews during the spring of first year, combining these with career panels, speakers, treks and internships to learn about potential careers and build a professional network. See below for our recommendations.

	Info Interviews (per semester/summer)	Networking Events per year (panels, alumnae talks, career treks)
First Year	2+	2+
Sophomore	3+	3+
Junior	4+	4+
Senior	As many as possible	As many as possible

Where?

Informational Interviews are requested by you, but should occur in a location convenient to the person you are interviewing. That could be by phone, video call, or at their office. See the “How” section for example requests.

Why?

Instead of hearsay or the portrayal of a career on television or in a movie, informational interviews provide real-world insight into a specific profession, industry or department. Most professionals are willing to share information regarding:

- **Career Path** - their journey from internship to post-college job through current job - what they have enjoyed? found frustrating? what attributed to their success? what they might do differently?
- **Current Role** - description of typical day, roles and responsibilities, schedule and workload
- **Department** - structure of department within organization, culture, typical background, opportunities for promotion
- **Organization** - basic structure, recruiting process, growth, culture, leadership
- **Industry** - competitors, challenges, trends shaping changes in hiring, best ways to network/find opportunities
- **Advice** - training required, best internships for breaking into industry, other people to contact

These professionals can also alert you to future career opportunities and internally advocate for you to be considered.

How? *Tips for Successful Informational Interviewing:*

1) Prepare Your Communication Toolkit: Resume and LinkedIn and no Digital Dirt.

- Review [Resume Guide, Templates and LinkedIn Checklist](#) on the Internship and Career Development website.
- After revising your resume, proof & upload it to agnesscott.joinhandshake.com/login for Career Coach’s review.
- Once completing your LinkedIn profile as much as you can, you may sign up in COMPASS for a LinkedIn review.
- Clean up your social media (Instagram, Twitter, etc.) before reaching out to professionals.
- Google yourself to make sure you know what might come up if a professional tries to “check you out.”

- 2) **Identify Your Objectives.** What do you hope to learn? Are there careers or organizations that pique your interest? What coursework do you prefer? Build on what you enjoy to identify potential areas about which to learn more.
- 3) **Make a List of Organizations and Roles/Professionals of Interest.** For more ideas, consult your current network:
 - *Alumnae* you meet through networking events, are referred to by the Internship/Career Development Office, or find on LinkedIn (Search LinkedIn for people, target industries, orgs or professions)
 - *ASC Faculty and Staff* - many have friends/family outside the college who might work in your field of interest
 - *Supervisors (Internship, volunteer or work)* – they can draw upon both personal and professional networks
- 4) **Ask with Intention.** Contact potential interviewees via LinkedIn or email with a professional message. Introduce yourself, explain your connection to them, and ask for 20 – 30 minutes of their time for insight into on their career/organization/industry. NEVER ask to meet for a meal or an alcoholic drink. If emailing, attach your resume for their easy reference. It is also helpful to suggest a day/timeframe where you have a lot of flexibility. Examples:
 - “Dear Ms. Rogers, I am interning in the ____ department and my supervisor, Sally Smith, suggested I talk to you to learn more about your career in accounting. Would you be willing to spend 20 minutes with me to share your career journey and provide a glimpse into your role as a financial analyst? I am available any day after 2pm.”
 - “Dear Ms. Brown, I am a sophomore at Agnes Scott College and really enjoy my math and psychology courses. I see from LinkedIn that you have a successful career in Market Analytics, and I would love to hear about your journey from psychology major to your current position. Would you be willing to speak with me for 20 minutes by phone so I can ask you some questions about your career path? I do not have class on Tuesday/Thursdays.”
- 5) **Prepare for the Meeting.** Once someone says yes to your request, you must prepare thoroughly and professionally. You requested the meeting, so it is your role to lead the conversation and convey respect for their time and advice.
 - Promptly ask and confirm the specifics of the interview – location, time, etc. Confirm the number on which you should contact the person (if by phone). Also, re-confirm the day before with a short, courteous email.
 - Research the professional and his/her organization (product/service, locations, client/service base, news and social media). You don’t want to ask questions that are easily answered by LinkedIn or the organization website.
 - Prepare ~ 5 written, appropriate, relevant questions. Review your objectives about what you want to learn, but the best questions are usually ones that focus on the professional’s career path:
 - Tell me about your career journey from college to your current role.
 - What factors do you think attributed most to your success?
 - What advice would you give someone like me who is interested in your industry or profession?
 - Is there anyone else you would recommend I speak with?
 - For more ideas, visit: <https://www.careercontessa.com/advice/questions-to-ask-informational-interview/>
- 6) **Lead a Professional Interview.**
 - If by phone, ensure a quiet place and clear connection. Be available on time. Introduce yourself – “Hello, this is Taylor Smith. Is this still a good time to talk?”
 - If in person or via video, dress professionally. Silence and put away your phone. Be on time and give a firm handshake. Make eye contact, smile and be attentive.
 - Watch the time to honor your request for a 20-30 minute meeting. Skip to your last questions if needed to wrap up.
- 7) **Thank you and Follow-up.**
 - Thank the professional at the time AND by email/personal note within 24 hours.
 - Invite them to connect on LinkedIn. Keep in touch with updates, ideas discussed, articles of interest, internships, your graduation. Thank them again for their advice.
 - If they referred you to someone else, reach out to that person within a week and always loop back to let them know where that referral takes you.

