



# Informational Interviewing

One of the best ways to explore career options and plan your job search is to talk directly with people who work in fields that interest you. This process is called informational interviewing. When combined with reading and experiential learning, such as internships and fieldwork, informational interviewing can help you to feel more knowledgeable and comfortable with career decisions. Whether you are a sophomore trying to make the connection between careers and majors, a senior looking for a job in a new city, or an alumna/us anticipating a career change, informational interviewing is a helpful tool.

## Use an Informational Interview to:

- Confirm your interest in specific career fields, and decide which ones to rule out.
- Meet people who share your interests, have similar talents, and are using them in their careers.
- Begin creating a professional network of contacts for internships and full-time positions.
- Learn about hiring and employment practices for certain industries and organizations.
- Gain experience, confidence, and skill in communicating with employers.
- Understand if a particular graduate or professional degree is the right choice for you, or learn about the career options that a degree can prepare you for.

## Connecting with the Vassar Network

As a Vassar student or alumna/us, you are part of, and have access to, a network of nearly 40,000 people who have shared the Vassar experience.

There are several ways to locate and connect with Vassar alumnae/i and others in the Vassar community.

First, join **VassarNet** (<https://vassarnet.vassar.edu>), Vassar's online community of alumnae/i, students, parents, faculty, and friends of Vassar, to build your network and find Vassar-connected opportunities. On VassarNet platform, you can:

- Search for people by industry, location, major, and more.
- Send messages to contacts of interest, and set up informational interviews.
- Join groups to affiliate over shared interests and identities.
- Search for (or post) internship and job opportunities for the Vassar community.
- Ask career-related questions and get answers from the community.

Second, to locate additional alumnae/i of interest, check out the **Alumnae/i Career Connections Directory** (<http://connect.vassar.edu/directory>). This directory contains all alumnae/i and you can search by year, major(s), location, industry, job title, employer, advanced degrees, international student status, and more.

Third, check out the profiles of more than 23,000 alumnae/i on **Vassar's LinkedIn "University" Page** (<https://www.linkedin.com/edu/vassar-college-19077>), where you can search for alumnae/i by employer, location, industry, major, and more.

Also, remember to tap into your personal network of family, friends, professors, and acquaintances. Friends of parents, parents of classmates, former teachers, and neighbors all are people you could turn to for assistance.

Even if they don't share your career interests, they may be able to refer you to someone who does.

The CDO is happy to review networking emails prior to you sending them to alumnae/i to make sure you are making a good impression. Make it clear that you are not interested in a job interview, but simply in gathering information. Set up a specific time to connect either in person or by phone/video (a half-hour should be sufficient to start).

As you prepare for your meeting, consider the questions you will want to ask. Make a list, if you like, to take along with you. Do some advance research on the career field or organization so you will have a better sense of how to direct the conversation.

Your interests, values, and personal style will dictate what topics you will want to address. For instance, if you are a highly creative person, you may want to find out about job independence, the degree to which innovation is prized, or the amount of flexibility in scheduling office time. If high achievement and prestige motivate you, you might want to focus on questions regarding leadership opportunities, requirements for advancement, or the degree of competition among people in the field. Your stage in the career development process also will determine what sorts of questions to ask.

Courtesy and professionalism should be your guides throughout the informational interview process. Remember that although they are willing to help, your interviewees are busy people. Most will feel flattered you sought them out for advice; however, they may have times when it simply is not convenient to talk with you.

It is important to dress neatly, call if you must cancel an appointment, and follow up each interview with a thank-you letter. You also should let your interviewees know when you have decided on a career field or accepted a job offer.

## A Word About Networking

Each time you conduct an informational interview, you have the opportunity to expand your list of contacts. Try not to leave an informational interview without the name of at least one more potential interviewee. Follow up with that person, ask for additional names, follow up with those people and...you get the picture.

If you are still unsure about informational interviewing, you might talk with a career staff member or Career Assistant. They have been through this process themselves and will gladly share their experiences.

## Sample Career Exploration Questions

- How do you spend a typical day or week? What tasks do you perform? How much variety/routine is there in your job?
- How did you get into this line of work? Was yours a typical career path?
- What do you think are the most important skills/qualifications for someone in this job?
- What are the most/least interesting aspects of your work?
- What type of environment is this to work in? How would you describe others in this field?
- What kind of work schedule does this job require? (overtime, weekends, freelancing, travel, 9-5, etc.)
- What is a typical entry-level position? What about starting salaries?
- Can you think of other jobs that would enable me to combine my skills in \_\_\_\_\_ and interests in \_\_\_\_\_?
- What professional organizations are active in this field? What trade/professional journals do you read?
- What advancement opportunities exist in this field?
- What advice would you have for me if I chose to pursue a career in this area?

## Sample Job Search Questions

- How and where are job openings typically publicized in this field?
- What departments in this organization might have jobs that would use my skills and interests?
- I'm interested in relocating to \_\_\_\_\_. Do you know of anyone in your industry that I could talk to there?
- How do most people get hired into this organization? Are some methods more effective than others?
- Are there part-time or freelance opportunities here?
- How competitive is the entry-level job market in this geographic area?
- What is the turnover rate for this type of position? Do you anticipate any vacancies in the near future?
- Do you know of other organizations in this field I should consider?
- Can you provide me with feedback on my resume?

8/29/19