INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Adapted from the UF Career Connections Center

PURPOSE OF THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Informational interviewing offers you an opportunity to gather information about a career field, job, or employer in which you are interested. The purpose of an informational interview is to expand your understanding <u>not</u> to ask for a job or internship.

Conducting an informational interview will help you actively:

- Secure firsthand information about jobs, work responsibilities, career paths, work settings, and organizational cultures.
- Build contacts and referrals for your personal network (increasing your chances of securing employment in the future).
- Increase your self-confidence and interviewing skills.
- Gather insight for stronger career decisions.

STEP 1: GETTING STARTED – FINDING CONTACTS TO INTERVIEW

The first step is to find people to interview. The goal is to find someone in a desired organization, job, or career field. Typically, the best place to start is with your personal network. This may include family, friends, roommates, past employers, and professors. Ask these contacts for the names of people within occupations or organizations that interest you. Additional ways that you can secure contact names include:

- Organizational websites/literature
- Professional/trade association chapters
- Chamber of Commerce directories
- Gator CareerLink Employer Directory
- Social Media
  - Twitter connections
  - LinkedIn alumni feature (My network → Find alumni → Search for UF alumni by organization, major, location, industry, job, and/or skills)

An in-person appointment is ideal, but Skype or phone can be as equally effective. After identifying the person to contact, request an appointment via email, telephone, or through a third party. If calling or emailing, use professional language, state who you are (including that you are a student), why you are contacting them, clearly state that you are not seeking a job at this time, but gathering career information, and ask if he/she is available to talk with you for 20-30 minutes. A third-party, such as friends, professors, or relatives, can help introduce you or arrange an informational interview for you.

STEP 2: PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Always prepare before an informational interview to ensure that you make a professional first-impression. Prepare by:

- Conducting preliminary research on the respective field or organization. Gather facts before you interview in order to formulate intelligent questions and avoid asking questions easily answered on the company's website or LinkedIn profile.
- Develop a list of questions on the topics you wish to investigate including personal questions, such as "Why did you choose this career field?", and general questions about organizational culture, career paths, and job responsibilities.

- Prepare open-ended questions to avoid yes/no answers. Open-ended questions will stimulate more response and discussion.
- Dress appropriately. Business casual dress is likely ideal, depending on how well you know the contact.
- If interviewing in-person, prepare for travel (consider time for traffic and parking). Arrive early. If interviewing via Skype, ensure all technology is working adequately, secure a quiet space where you will not be interrupted, and make sure the background behind you is clean and distraction free.

STEP 3: CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW
- Start the interview by restating your purpose for the interview. Share insight as to why you are seeking career information and the general types of questions you will be asking.
- Take notes. If you want to record the conversation, make sure to ask permission first.
- Be prepared to answer questions about yourself, background, and career ambitions.
- You can offer to show your resume to help them understand your experiences and qualifications. It may be a good idea to ask for specific resume/job search advice. But, be careful not to appear you are asking for a job.
- Ask if there are articles, professional associations, websites, or books that might help you learn more.
- Always ask who they recommend you talk with next.
- Thank the individual for the information and his/her time. End the conversation with a professional handshake.

STEP 4: AFTER THE INTERVIEW
- Send a thank you email or card.
- Refer to some portion of the conversation and why the advice that was given was helpful to you.

FINAL REMINDERS:
- Most informational interviews last 20-30 minutes. Don't continue to ask questions longer than this unless the contact seems willing to accommodate. Keep the conversation brief and friendly.
- This is NOT the time to ask for a job or internship. Focus on learning about the occupation, career field, and/or organization.
- Conduct several informational interviews, asking similar questions to different people, in order to get a broader perspective and identify patterns about the occupation or career field. This can greatly improve your decision-making confidence

SAMPLE QUESTIONS
Below are some sample questions that may help guide your interview process. (Don't ask all of these.) Feel free to add others that are more customized to you, the individual, and the industry.
- How did you get into this career field/industry?
- How would you describe a typical day/week on the job?
- What is your job like?
- What kind of decisions do you make?

- How did you get your job? Why did you decide to work for this company/organization?
- What are the most satisfying aspects of your job?
- What frustrations or drawbacks do you experience at work?
- How would you describe the work environment such as work, pressure, deadlines, and routines?
- What educational degrees, licenses, or other credentials are required for entry and advancement in your kind of work? Are there any which are preferred or helpful?
- What are the essential skills to be successful in this line of work? How did you learn these skills (e.g., training programs, classroom, on the job)?
- What personal, characteristics, personality traits, values, strengths, and/or interests do you believe are necessary or helpful for success and satisfaction in this occupation (or organization)?
- What are the key software programs/technical skills in the field?
- How much time do you spend alone? Interacting with people? Writing reports? In meetings?
- What's an example of a problem that you help solve at work?
- How does your career affect your lifestyle (the amount of time you work vs. time for leisure, traveling, family, outside interests)?
- What kinds of entry-level jobs and titles are typical for this career field or employer?
- How would an individual set themselves out from other candidates applying for positions?
- Looking back, would you have done anything differently in your career?
- What are the latest developments and primary issues impacting this field today?
- What are the trade/professional groups to which you belong and which do you find most beneficial to your work? What is your advice about getting involved with these organizations as a student?
- What other areas within the organization do you collaborate with the most?
- How do people learn about job openings in the field?
- What do you wish you had known about this career field before you entered it?
- How is this organization structured?
- What is your organization's leadership/management philosophy? How does this differ from other organizations in this field/industry?
- What is the typical career progression in this field? What are the keys to advancement?
- What books/periodicals/websites that you would recommend?
- What advice would you give to a young person entering this field, industry, or line of work?