INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Informational interviewing is one of the most important networking and job search tools. In addition to building your network, informational interviews help you explore careers, industries, companies, and help clarify career goals. You will gain first-hand knowledge about a company or field, determine if a certain career path is a good fit for you, and have your questions answered. They also give you exposure within a company and can give you access to the hidden job market.

**INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS**

Informational interviews are brief Q&A sessions between students and employees via phone, video conference, or in person. Conducting informational interviews will expand your network, improve your confidence when speaking with professionals, and help you learn more about an industry, company, profession, or position within a company. They can help you gain access to the hidden job market if the person you speak to has insight into jobs that may be open in the future but are not yet posted online. You can request an information interview with anyone in your network.

**STEPS FOR SUCCESS**

1. Research careers, industries, and companies
2. Assess your network
3. Reach out
4. Determine questions you will ask
5. Follow up with a thank you note within 24 hours

**1. RESEARCH CAREERS, INDUSTRIES, AND COMPANIES**

- Use LinkedIn, company websites, wikipedia, news sources, and business journals to do company and industry research. Links to resources are found on page 3 of this document.
- Attend company information sessions and coffee chats, and participate in case competitions.
- Refer to the BBA Career Management online resources.
- Meet with a career coach for a career exploration appointment.

Research will help you narrow down where you might like to work and what you would like to do. Once you have determined a target industry, company, or role, move on to the next step.

**2. ASSESS YOUR NETWORK**

**Personal Connections**
- Family Friends
- Students from your high school
- Fellow volunteers
- Members of community organizations

**McCombs Connections**
- Upperclassmen with internships
- Members of student organizations
- Professors
- BBACM events and workshops
- HookedIn/ McCombs Alumni Directory

**Professional Connections**
- Fellow interns
- LinkedIn connections at target firms
- Members of professional organizations (e.g. American Marketing Association)

Identify people in your network to interview based on their skills and experiences in areas you are interested in. It is a good idea to identify 4-6 people to reach out to, as you can expect about a 25% response rate to your messages. Don’t be discouraged! Typically, the closer the connection, the more likely you are to receive a response. However, some people just like being helpful and talking to students, so you shouldn’t hesitate to reach out to anyone who has an interesting role or is working at your dream company.
3. REACHING OUT

Hi [First name],

I’m [first name], currently a [year + major] at the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas at Austin. May I have a few minutes of your time to discuss your experience as a [classification, e.g. McCombs alum or member of X organization] at [current company]?

Your insights would be greatly appreciated, as I’m considering [XYZ industry/role/organization].

Thank you,
[First name]

◊ When you reach out, use the contact’s first name to be most inclusive (don’t assume a person’s pronouns- if they have listed pronouns on their LinkedIn profile, you can use Mr./Mrs./Ms.)
◊ If you don’t hear back from the person within 7 business days, follow up with them. If they don’t respond to the follow up, they are unlikely to ever respond, so continue to reach out to other contacts.
◊ Set a reminder on your calendar immediately after sending your initial note so you don’t forget to follow up.
◊ You don’t need to include your availability in the initial email. Once someone responds positively, send a range of times that work for you and ask them to confirm their preferred mode of communication: telephone or video conference.
◊ Once the timing is confirmed, send a calendar invite to your contact for the time you have agreed upon. Specify who will contact whom and how- if it is a phone call, it is best practice to use a subject line like “X to call Y at 000-000-0000”.

4. QUESTIONS TO ASK AND WHY

Below are questions that you can ask, and what you can learn by asking them. You do not need to ask every single question, but these are a good place to start. If you have other specific questions in mind, ask those as well! Treat this like a regular interview: dress professionally, show up on time, and be prepared by doing your research on the person beforehand and having a list of questions ready.

Can you tell me more about your career path, and what led you to where you are today?
WHY: If you have access to some information about the person, tailor the question to what you know to show you have done your research.

What were some of your early roles in the field, and how did they help you get to where you are today? What did you learn there?
WHY: This will help you understand how you can best position yourself to meet your long term career goals. If you desire a similar role, knowing how they got there and if their path was linear will be helpful.

If you had to summarize your biggest priorities in a week, what does that look like?
WHY: This will help you understand how good a fit the role will be for you. If someone says they work independently, writing reports 90% of the time, and you know you prefer a more collaborative environment, this is not the right job.

What are some big projects you are working on now or in the past few months?
WHY: This will give you a sense of what keeps the job interesting, and some of the key priorities for the company.

What do you enjoy most about the work you do, and what are you most excited about right now?
WHY: What a person enjoys about their work may be different than what they are working on right now. This is a good way to get the person to open up and share more about themselves. Even if it is not something that is a responsibility of the job, it could tell you something about the company culture (for example, if they lead an employee resource group, it tells you that the company supports employees spending worktime building community).

What do you enjoy the least? OR Is there something that surprised you about the job when you started?
WHY: This will give you insight into the aspects of the job that might not be spelled out in the job description, and you can use this information to help you decide if it is a good fit for you.

What skills do you think are most important for someone in a job like yours?
WHY: This will help you identify gaps in your skills and bolster your resume. If the person states that Excel is critical, you could take a LinkedIn learning course on Excel prior to applying to a similar role. Whatever the person mentions first is likely what they use they most often and is most critical to their job, and this information can also help you decide if the role is a good fit for you.
4. QUESTIONS TO ASK AND WHY, continued.

What are some of the biggest challenges you face day to day?
**WHY:** This will give you insight into issues that this person faces day-to-day. These could be managerial issues (e.g., not enough time to complete tasks) or they could be indicative of the position of the firm in the market currently (e.g., we are working hard to create unique content to better compete with a rival streaming service). Challenges in the latter bucket can help you prepare for questions you could get in an interview in the future.

What are the biggest rewards from this role?
**WHY:** This will also get the person to open up, and will focus the conversation on the positives. If they cannot answer this question, it can be a red flag.

What do you wish you knew when you started on this path?
**WHY:** You will get advice that you can implement for your job search.

What skills do you think college students should focus on during their undergraduate degree?
**WHY:** You may get advice on software to learn or experiences they look for on a resume, such as leadership positions in student organizations, part-time work, sports participation, etc.

Is there anything I didn’t ask that you wished I would have?
**WHY:** When you are still learning about different companies and roles, you will only know what you have learned so far. This question gives the interviewer an opportunity to share something that may not be obvious but could be very helpful to you.

Do you have any recommendation for someone else I should talk to? Or books/magazines to read or podcasts to listen to?
**WHY:** Every person you speak to will have a different perspective that will add to your knowledge about a company, role, or industry. If the person doesn’t have a recommendation for another person that would be helpful, they may share a news source that will be good to keep current with trends in the industry. Following these trends can help you prepare for an interview.

5. FOLLOW UP

- Follow up with a brief thank you email within 24 hours of your informational interview.
- Be succinct, use professional language, and double check your spelling and grammar.
- If the person you interviewed asked you to send them anything (e.g. your resume or more details on something interesting you mentioned that they wanted to know more about, like a book), do so in your thank you.

RESOURCES

- Alumni (via McCombs Alumni Directory, HookedIn, or LinkedIn)
- BBACM Website Resources
- Biz Journals, Book of Lists
- Business Information Center (through PCL resources)
- Company Information Sessions and Coffee Chats
- Glassdoor (inside information from employees)
- Google Alerts (set for favorite companies)
- Industry Blogs and News Sources (e.g. Ars Technica, CNET, Marketing Dive, TechCrunch, Wired)
- McCombs Online Resources (Vault, Reference USA)
- Local Business Journals (great if you are focused on a specific location)
- O*NET (Occupational Outlook Guide)
- Business and Economics Podcasts (HBR IdeaCast, NPR’s Marketplace, Freakonomics, Odd Lots, Stephanomics)