

## INFORMATIONAL DISCUSSIONS AND CAREER SHADOWING

An informational discussion (interview) is a conversation with someone who is knowledgeable about an occupation or industry that interests you. Career shadowing is when the conversation takes place where the person works and you are allowed to watch or “shadow” them as they work. The purpose of informational discussions and career shadowing is to:

- Get a first-person account and, with career shadowing, to observe someone on the job.
- Learn about preparation and qualifications needed to enter and succeed in the occupation/industry
- Learn about job responsibilities, rewards, challenges and job outlook
- Get advice and suggestions
- Make a new contact for your network
- Get names of other professional contacts and resources
- Get feedback on your resume

It’s a good idea to conduct several information discussions in order to get a reliable consensus of information. Opinions and experiences may differ and the information and advice you receive may be confusing and even contradictory.

While an informational discussion is not a job interview and you are not asking for employment, you may be making a contact for future internship or employment opportunities. It is important that you make a good impression through your preparation, presentation and follow-up.

### **How to conduct an informational discussion or career shadow:**

1. Decide upon a person you would like to interview. You can get help with this from Career Development counselors, faculty, family, friends, etc.
2. Contact the person (via phone, email, or in person) to ask about the possibility of an interview. Practice your conversation in advance. If she/he agrees, schedule the interview.
3. Research the industry, company, and person prior to the interview.
4. Prepare and bring a list of relevant questions to the interview. (See [Sample Questions](#).)
5. Bring a pen and a portfolio to take notes during the interview.
6. Ideally, the discussion should last about 30 minutes and be conducted at the person’s workplace. Respect the person’s time.
7. Dress appropriately, as you would for a hiring interview.
8. Be professional in your communication and behavior (i.e. No slang, arrive on time, turn off phone).
9. When the discussion/shadowing is complete, demonstrate your appreciation and professionalism by sending a thank-you letter, preferably within 24-hours (see thank you letter format).

## **Sample Informational Discussion Questions**

*You only have about 30 minutes so choose wisely!*

(Additional questions will probably occur to you spontaneously as your conversation gets under way.)

Describe a typical workweek. What do you do on a day-to-day basis?

Describe your primary responsibilities.

Describe your working environment. Is it competitive, fast-paced, conservative, routine, etc.?

What do you like most about your work? Least?

Describe the rewards of your job as well as the problems/obstacles.

What part of this job do you find most satisfying? Most challenging?

From your perspective, what are the problems you see working in this field, now and in the future?

What qualifications, skills, academic background, and personal qualities are required for this position?

How did you get started in this career/field? What factors played a role in your success? Would you do anything differently if you could start over?

What opportunities for advancement are there in this field?

What entry-level jobs are best for learning as much as possible?

What are the salary ranges for various levels in this field?

What are the current issues in the field?

How do you see jobs in this field changing in the future?

What is the outlook for this industry/field? What areas have the most potential for expansion?

What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field?

Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field?

Do you know of anyone who works at company XYZ?

What specific advice would you give a person entering this field?

Would you mind looking at my resume? How would you assess my experiences in terms of entering this field?

Can you refer me to other professionals in the field who might have additional information, advice, and suggestions? May I say you recommended them?