What are informational Interviews?
Informational interviews are not job interviews, but rather short conversations (about 20 minutes) where you gather information about a field, industry, organization or company that interests you. They are also opportunities for you to practice your interviewing skills while gaining valuable information about possible career paths. You can also practice networking skills as you develop contacts in your field of interest.

During an informational interview, the objective is to ask questions, gather information about a career field or organization, learn about job options and career paths, and make contact with people who can help identify opportunities in their fields.

Keep in mind that you can use this skill anywhere and at any time you meet someone who has information about your job interests. Informational interviewing should become a cornerstone of your job search strategy.

Do not ask for a job during an informational interview; this is a serious breach of etiquette. Informational interviews are for information gathering only.

Advantages of Informational Interviewing
When done well, these interviews or conversations with working professionals allow you to:

Gain insight into:
• Particular fields, organizations, or industries
• Job market in those fields

• Variety of jobs available within each field or organization
• Skills, educational background & experience required for various job opportunities
• Average workday of someone employed in a field or organization
• How different kinds of organizations recruit and hire new people
• Professional organizations and publications associated with the field
• Salary ranges, jargon, job titles, etc., in the field or organization
• Career paths of professionals in the field

Practice and improve your interviewing skills by learning to:
• Present yourself and your goals
• Polish your written and spoken communication skills
• Listen carefully to others and engage them in conversation
• Ask informed questions
• Comfortably meet and greet new people with poise and self-assurance

Become a better job candidate by:
• Having a greater understanding of the organization or industry
• Internalizing the language of the field or industry and learning to communicate like a professional in that field
• Building a network of professionals who know you and want to help you
• Learning how to target interesting jobs as well as the individuals making the hiring decisions
• Using the knowledge you’ve gained from your contacts to rule out some job possibilities and investigate others
• Gaining confidence in yourself (your knowledge of the field, your interviewing skills, etc.) and enthusiasm for the field you’ve decided to pursue.
Preparing for an Informational Interview:

1. Think about what fields you want to explore.
What kind of work would you like to do? What jobs have you dreamed about doing in the past? What kind of work environment appeals to you?

If you are in the early stages of your job search and/or don’t know exactly what you want to do, you should start by making an appointment to see a Career Advancement counselor (call 773-702-7040). Career Advancement counselors can help you do a self-assessment and identify possible career paths that might suit you. Career Advancement also offers career exploration programs throughout the year.

2. Develop a list of possible contacts.
Start by thinking of the people you know – friends, friends of friends, relatives, neighbors, etc. Someone in your personal network may know someone working in your field of interest. Whenever possible, try to talk to people who are doing the job you want to do, since they are closest to the job search and may be able to offer you advice and information from their own experience. Use the University of Chicago’s online alumni directory (accessible via the Career Advancement website) to find alumni as well. You can also find people in your network by using LinkedIn.

Talk with a Career Advancement counselor about how to identify possible contacts.

3. Determine your goals.
Your general goals are threefold: (a) you want to learn more about the career path you’re considering, (b) you want to learn more about the organization and the type of work your contact does there, and (c) you want to meet additional contacts in the field. As you speak with more and more people, you’ll develop more specific goals and more focused questions.

4. Develop a contact strategy.
Before contacting anyone, think about how you will introduce yourself to them and how you will request an informational interview. If you’ve been referred to your contact by someone they know, use their name. People are more likely to talk to a friend/colleague of someone they know, which is why you should start with your personal and academic network. Be concise in your request while also conveying why you want to speak with that particular person.

5. Get organized.
Develop an “elevator speech”. This mini self-introduction is key to providing information to your contact so they understand how best to help and what kind of information to provide to you.

Draft a list of questions or issues you want to discuss during the informational interview and bring it with you.

Keep track of the people you have contacted, when you spoke with them, what you talked about, what steps you need to take to follow up on referrals they may have given you, etc. This will help you keep clear in your mind who everyone is as you meet more and more people. See the “Sample Contact Record” below for some help on how to think about this.

Arranging the interview:

1. Requesting an informational interview.
This can be done via email or phone. Email gives you time to craft your request and gives your contact time to respond. Do not request via text, Facebook, or Twitter. Briefly introduce yourself and express your intent to gather information only.

Indicate why you want to interview your contact, and add a sentence or two about your own background and goals. Tell your contact when you are available to meet. In-person informational interviews in a public place are ideal, but you can also conduct one via phone or email. Give them a few options; they may be very busy, so be flexible. You may include your resume, but make it clear that it is only for reference.

2. Conduct additional research.
Your contact will probably be more engaged and forthcoming with information during your interview if you are well prepared for your meeting and serious about your job search. It cannot be emphasized enough how important it is to research the industry, the company, and, whenever possible, the interviewee. Do not appear unprepared! Prepare questions ahead of time.

Conducting an effective interview:

1. Be prompt - for both phone and in-person interviews.
Call or arrive at the agreed upon time. Being late makes you appear unprofessional and even disrespectful.
2. Briefly introduce yourself and describe the kind of information you seek.
This is where your elevator speech and list of questions come in handy.

3. Keep to the time limit agreed upon.
Always be courteous, respectful, and appreciative of your contact's time and energy. If you're having a good conversation as your coming to the end of your time, let the interviewee know you're willing to talk longer but you want to respect their time constraints.

4. Ask for suggestions of additional contacts.
At the end of the interview, if the interview has gone well and you feel comfortable doing so, ask for the names of two or three people they suggest you additionally reach out to. Follow up with that referral in a timely fashion.

After the interview:
1. Make notes about the interview.
Write down the salient points and draft a list of new questions you have as a result of the interview. You should also draft a list of “next steps” that you should take.

2. Stay organized
Keep track of all correspondence and phone calls with your contacts, as well as the names of any new contacts.

3. Write a thank-you note.
Be sure to thank the interviewee for his or her time and advice as the interview is concluding as well as in a thank you note. Writing a thank-you note is not simply a courtesy, but another chance for you to leave your name and number with your contact--and another chance for your contact to remember you when he or she hears of a great job available in your field. It is appropriate to send thank you notes via email; it is not appropriate to send thank you notes via text message.

Sample Email Request (Number 1)
This is a guide. You should develop your own request using your own words.

[Contact: John Hireman, Credit Suisse First Boston in NY]
Dear Mr. Hireman:

I am a fourth year student at The University of Chicago majoring in Economics. In exploring the Alumni Careers Network, I noticed you have been working in the financial services industry for the past three years. Now that I find myself in the position of building my own career in the field, I wanted to ask if you could offer fifteen minutes of your time to discuss ways in which a novice such as myself can best forge a path of his own. I feel it is important for me to gain a practical, real world, perspective about the field and hope that you will be able to shed some light. I will be in New York on spring break March 20-27 and can meet with you at a time most convenient for you. Or, if you prefer, we could converse by phone.

I have attached my resume to give you a sense of my background. It would be an honor to speak with you.

Thank You,

David Szymanski
773-555-6987 (cell)

Sample Email Request (Number 2)
This is a guide. You should develop your own request using your own words.

[Contact: Maria Manager, Leo J. Shapiro in Chicago]
Dear Ms. Manager:

My friend, Marvin Case, recommended I contact you regarding your work at Leo J. Shapiro. I am a graduate student in the social sciences at The University of Chicago and will be graduating this year.

I am exploring career paths outside of academe and I would like to know more about market research. I really enjoy using my analytical and quantitative skills and hope to learn more about how these skills might be useful in a for-profit environment.

Would you be willing to meet over coffee for 20 minutes to talk about your career path in market research and the field in general? I can easily meet you at a location near your office or, if it’s more convenient, we could speak by phone.

I have attached my resume to give you a sense of my education and experience so far. I would greatly appreciate a chance to speak with you.

Thank You,

Tonya Levin
Sample Contact Record
Use this sample, or another record-keeping system of your own design, to keep track of your correspondence and conversations with your contacts.

Contact Name: __________________________ Title: __________________________
Organization: __________________________ Field: __________________________
Location: ________________________________
Phone: __________________________ Email: ______________________________
Source of Contact: __________________________
Source's Relationship to You: __________________________
Date of Initial Contact: __________________________ First Follow Up: __________________________
Thank-you Letter Sent: __________________________
Notes: __________________________________________

Sample Questions
This is not an exhaustive list, but a good starting place.

• How did you get started in this field?
• What is your typical day (week) like at ________? What different kinds of activities are you engaged in?
• How many accounts/projects do you work on? What kinds of clients/people do you serve? What kinds of services do you provide?
• What do you enjoy most about what you do? What do you enjoy least?
• What kinds of skills and abilities are required for this type of work?
• What kinds of people are successful in this field (this organization)?
• What training or education is required for this type of work?
• Can you describe the work environment in your organization in terms of individual effort vs. teamwork, pressure, deadlines, workload, etc.?
• What publications are especially important for people in your field?
• If you were starting out now, how would you get into this field? What strategies would you use to get your foot in the door? What advice would you give to someone in my position?
• What makes a resume go to the top of the pile?
• How does your firm or organization differ from others in your field?

Sample Thank-You Note
This is a guide. You should develop your own thank-you note using your own words.

[Contact: John Hireman, Credit Suisse First Boston in NY]
Dear Mr. Hireman:

I'm writing to thank you again for speaking with me this morning. I enjoyed our conversation about Credit Suisse, and the interesting turns your career path has taken. In particular, it was great to hear your perspective on how your University of Chicago degree prepared you for your first position in the financial services industry.

Our discussion regarding the role of hedge funds in this economy was especially enlightening. I'm enclosing an article I found on this subject from The Economist, which provides yet another point of view on this topic.

Finally, I wanted to thank you for providing me the names of Susan Brown and James Doe. I plan to contact them tomorrow morning.

Sincerely,

David Szymanski
Career Advancement Services and Resources

See a Career Advancement Counselor
All students are encouraged to see a Career Advancement counselor at some point in their university career. Counselors are able to offer assistance with job application materials, including resumes and cover letters. Staff is also able to help discuss broader plans like graduate or professional school. Students are encouraged to make an appointment and can either call 773-702-7040 or do so online.

Walk-In Appointments
Throughout the year, Career Advancement counselors make themselves available for short, walk-in appointments. The hours vary from quarter to quarter but the website is always up-to-date with current hours. Students looking for brief assistance are encouraged to use these appointments as a way to quickly move forward in their search.

Career Advancement Programs and Resources
Career Advancement offers programs throughout the year designed to educate students about career options in a variety of fields, as well as build crucial job search skills (informational interviewing, networking, etc.). View the Career Advancement event calendar online to learn more. Be sure to browse our Career Resource Library as well as our website for additional resources.

Chicago Career Connection (CCC)
Accessible via the Career Advancement website, this online tool – specifically for University of Chicago students and alumni – lists full- and part-time jobs and internships, in Chicago, nationally, and even internationally. Jobs and internships listed are in business, government and nonprofits.

UChicago Careers In...
These series of University of Chicago programs helps undergraduate students learn about and prepare for careers in the arts, business, communications, education, health professions, journalism, law, non-profit/public service, science and technology, and social work. Some programs are selective and others are open to all students. To learn more about this great University of Chicago offering, visit the UChicago Careers In... section of the Career Advancement website.

Email Listhosts
Join the Consulting Career Advancement email list to get regular updates on career-related programs and job postings. You might also join the general business management listhost. Sign up via Chicago Career Connection (accessible via the Career Advancement website) and edit your profile to start receiving these emails.

Employer Information Sessions
Employers looking to hire students in consulting come to campus each year to host information sessions. This is a great way to learn about particular companies and network. View the Career Advancement event calendar online to learn more and see the schedule.

Researching Organizations
Know who the dominant players within the sector are as well as all the companies that are going to participate in on-campus recruiting. You can obtain first-hand accounts of the company’s culture and philosophy by talking to University of Chicago alumni who are working at the firm (see networking and informational interviewing above). A good understanding of the work environment will go a long way in answering “fit” questions during the interview process and will help you differentiate the firms to enable you to pick those that best fit your personality.

Networking and Informational Interviewing
Whether you just want to learn more about a career in consulting or you’re ready to apply for jobs, conducting informational interviews and networking with individuals already working in that field is a crucial part of the process. Career Advancement counselors can show you how to use the online alumni directory to identify University of Chicago alumni in this field; how to set up and prepare for an informational interview; and how to network effectively. Make an appointment by calling 773-702-7040.

Practice Your Interviewing
Practice Interviewers: Career Advancement has practice interviewers on staff to conduct mock behavioral and case interviews. To schedule a practice interview call 773-702-7040.
Career Advancement Super Interview Walk-In Days:
Career Advancement holds “Super Interview Walk-In Days” for undergraduate and graduate students at the beginning of fall and winter quarters. Students interested in participating in a short, walk-in appointment style interview should attend. These days will be listed on the Career Advancement calendar online.

On-Campus Recruiting (OCR)
Every year employers come to campus to recruit University of Chicago students. In order to participate in OCR, you must be activated in Chicago Career Connection, which will allow you to view OCR-specific job postings. To become activated in CCC and to learn more about OCR, speak with a Career Advancement counselor.