

SUNY GENESEO

THE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM



INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW GUIDELINES AND REQUIREMENTS

To complete your Freshman PD Series and be eligible to apply for the School of Business, you must complete an **informational interview**. Read these instructions ***carefully***, and more than once.

The purpose of an informational interview is to gather information, insights, and guidance about a particular career by speaking directly to a person currently employed in your career of interest. Through the interview you will also learn about the industry and what it takes to be successful. It is a conversational, low stress way to learn about careers, companies, and professions.

The information interview forces you to start the process of exploring your career options. If you are uncertain about whether you want to major in a business field, the informational interview will help you make a good decision. An informational interview is also the way you start connecting with Geneseo alumni and building a professional network.

Your Goal: Learn about career options by talking with someone in a career you think you might like to pursue

Your Plan:

1. Identify a field of interest (e.g., marketing, accounting, finance, management) or a particular industry you want to target (e.g., sports and entertainment, non-profit sector, health care/pharmaceuticals).
2. Do some research and find out what types of careers are associated with the field or industry you want to explore.
3. Identify a few career fields that seem particularly interesting and suited to your academic and personal strengths.
4. Identify a person you want to interview and get prepared to contact the individual with your request.
5. Arrange for a time and place to meet with your contact.
6. Get prepared for the meeting by developing your questions.
7. Conduct the interview; take notes during or right after the interview is finished so you remember what you heard.
8. Send a personal thank you note.
9. Use the information gathered for your application memo (when you apply to the School of Business).

Step 1: Identifying a Target Career or Industry

No Idea What Career to Target? Not Sure About Your Professional Interests?

No problem...this is the time to start exploring careers and assessing your personal strengths and interests. You can't lose because you will either find something you like or discover something you absolutely have no interest in doing.

- Go to Career Services and complete some of the career assessment tools. Talk to others...faculty, friends, family, fellow students.
- Read the Wall Street Journal to get an understanding of what's going on in various industry sectors, firms, and professions.
- Common business fields include accounting, finance, marketing, management, human resource management, operations, and international business.

For example, a career in marketing can mean anything from being in advertising to marketing research to customer relations to brand management and so on. There are careers in marketing for people with creative strengths as well as quantitative strengths and everything in between.

- Industry / Sectors are things such as healthcare, pharmaceuticals, sports and entertainment, banking and financial services, manufacturing, non-profits, insurance, retail, and so on.

Industry sectors often involve careers that require education and skills far afield of business, however *every* industry has career paths where a business background is valuable if not necessary. Physicians work in the health care industry, but so do operations managers, healthcare administrators, accountants, human resource professionals and marketing professionals.

You will have to do a little research to narrow down the options. But the good news is that you're not committed to following any particular path at this point in time.

Other Resources

Visit websites that provide information about professions and careers, including required educations, skills and earnings potential. The Bureau of Labor Statistics provides extensive information that can help you get started

<http://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/>

Just Google "Finding the Right Career" and you will have more advice than you need.

Consider free or adapted versions of assessments such as Strengths Finder.

Still uncertain. Don't worry. Give yourself some time, but stay in research mode. Eventually you will find something that makes you curious. When you do, it's time for the next step...

Step 2: Finding Someone to Interview

Who Can Be Interviewed?

You can interview almost anybody you like, providing the individual agrees to be interviewed. You may NOT, however, interview any of the following individuals:

- Your parents or legal guardians, brothers, or sisters (but they can put you in touch with someone if you are interested in their fields and/or firm)
- A member of the School of Business faculty or staff
- Another college student, friend, roommate, boyfriend/girlfriend, fraternity brother/sorority sister, teammate, or person others would reasonably consider to be a peer

If you are in doubt, ask!

How Can You Find Someone to Interview?

There are many ways to identify someone you can interview. The best options involve “warm leads” identified by people you know personally or people we (at Geneseo) know.

- Ask your family and friends of your family if they know anybody working in the career field you have selected. Ask them if they know somebody who might know somebody.
- Consider seeking out a **young Geneseo alum** in your career field—someone who graduated within the last five years. If you want to be connected with an alum, speak to the Dean of the Business School. The alum would love to talk to you. However, you will need be aware of our alumni networking etiquette policies before you will get contact information for alumni.

Other options involve “cold calls.” It may take persistence and effort, but you might be surprised who is willing to talk to a student about his/her career.

- Search LinkedIn for companies and/or professionals of interest.
- Contact local chapter of professional organizations such as the AMA or SHRM
- If you have a particular company in mind, there is nothing stopping you from contacting a person working for that company and asking for an informational interview. It helps to know a particular position and a name.

Bottom Line: If you know what type of career or profession you want to target, we will find someone for you to interview. And we can more than likely find that person in Rochester, Buffalo, or New York City.

Tips for Success

- Don't over-reach. You may want to be a CEO of a Fortune 50 company one day, but CEOs are busy people. So are people with titles such as Vice President, Principal, Partner, or Managing Director.
- Follow the script. We provide a template for arranging and conducting your interview. It has been carefully crafted and tested. Unless you have a personal connection to the person you are going to interview, we recommend you stick to the script.

Step 3: Arranging Your Interview

Rules of Engagement

1. **The best outcome is an interview in person**, at the business location of the person being interviewed. Alternatively, the interviewee may agree or ask to meet in another setting (e.g., a coffee shop). It will be your responsibility to get to the interview location ON TIME. You must also be respectful of the other person's time and end the interview on time.
2. **If a face-to-face meeting is not possible**, you should plan to conduct your interview over the phone, or virtually using Skype or Google Hangout. Try your best to get a Skype/Google Hangout if possible. Use the phone as a last resort.

Asking for the Interview

Once you have the name and contact information for the person you want to interview, please use the following language guidelines over the Phone or Via Email.

Hello.

My name is _____, and I am a (*freshman/sophomore*) at SUNY Geneseo majoring in _____ (*Business, Marketing, Management, Finance, Accounting, or Economics*).

I have reached out to you today because you are part of the Geneseo alumni network.

Or ...you were referred to me by_____.

Or ...I researched your professional profile on LinkedIn.

A part of my degree requirements is an informational interview to help me learn more about career paths related to my major. I am hoping you can set aside some time to speak with me about your professional experience and expertise.

Would you be willing to schedule 20-30 minutes to share your insights and advice with me?

Sincerely,

_____ *Your Name*

Depending on their answer, move on to "Making the Arrangements"

Making the Arrangements

Assuming the individual agrees to talk with you, explore arrangement options as follows:

A face-to-face meeting is ideal...

I live in the (*Rochester or NYC*) area and I would be happy to meet you in person, at your office or a convenient place nearby.

Or...

I will be home for summer break after May 15.

Or ...winter break after December 15.

Or ...I am available on any Friday.

Do you think we might be able to arrange a short meeting in person?

If you get agreement, proceed to set a specific date and time. Provide your cell number in case your interviewee needs to reach you for any reason. Don't have an unprofessional VM message greeting.

If the face-to-face meeting is impossible...

Would you be amenable to speaking over Skype?

Would you be available to speak over the phone?

If you get agreement, proceed to set a specific date and time. Provide your cell number in case your interviewee needs to reach you for any reason. Don't have an unprofessional VM message greeting.

Confirming Your Appointment

Regardless of whether your meeting is in person, over Skype, or over the phone, send an email to your interviewee 48 hours in advance to confirm the interview.

Hello.

I am looking forward to our meeting (Skype call or phone call) scheduled for _____ (time) on _____ (m/d/y). Please let me know if that is still convenient for you. Should you need to reach me, my cell number is xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Best regards,

Your name

LAST CHANCE...TAKE NOTE!

If something has come up and you cannot make the appointment, this is the time to ask to reschedule.

Please do not ask to reschedule unless it is absolutely necessary. You are asking for a favor, so don't take too many liberties.

If the interviewee asks to reschedule, kindly accommodate the request.

Step 4: Preparing for and Conducting Your Interview

Develop Informational Interview Questions

- It is important for you to go into the interview with a planned set of questions. But remember, you have limited time.
 - Put your five most important questions at the top of your list.
 - Stick to your time commitment (20 minutes... 30 minutes...). Here are some sample questions, but you are encouraged to develop your own questions based on the career field, industry, company or profession you are targeting.
1. How did you start in your career?
 2. What is a typical career path in this field?
 3. What skills are most critical for success in this field?
 4. Could you describe a typical work day?
 5. What are the top qualities your company looks for in entry-level candidates?
 6. What part of your job do you find most challenge/satisfying?
 7. What advice would you give me?

Research the Company and Profession in Advance

- Find out all that you can about the company your interviewee works for. Review the website and any other publicly available information. Do not start your interview with no idea what the person's company does to turn a dollar!
- You should have done some homework already on the type of profession or career you are investigating. Go back and take another look at your notes.
- Research on the company and the profession should give you some good questions to ask.

Gathering Your Materials - the Day Before

- Have your questions printed out
- Bring paper and a pen to take notes
- Print out a copy of the "Verification Instructions" document to give to the person you are interviewing (or for Skype or phone interviews, make sure you have an electronic copy handy)
- Face-to-Face Meeting? Make sure you have your directions and know where you are going
- Virtual or Phone? Know what number you are calling

The Day Of...THE MOST IMPORTANT RULES OF ALL TO FOLLOW

IT IS ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL FOR YOU TO SHOW UP, BE ON TIME, LOOK PROFESSIONAL, AND CONDUCT YOURSELF APPROPRIATELY. YOU ARE REPRESENTING GENESEO AND THE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS.

ANY FEEDBACK TO THE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS WHICH INDICATES THAT YOU DID NOT FOLLOW THESE RULES WILL LEAD TO AN AUTOMATIC “F” FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT. YOU WILL NEED TO FIND A NEW MAJOR.

And, no, we are not joking.

SHOW UP!

Do not set up a meeting, Skype call, or phone call and fail to show up! *Don't even think about it.* It's an automatic rejection on your School of Business application.

If circumstances are so dire that you must cancel:

1. Get in touch with the person you have arranged to meet/talk to **BEFORE THE DESIGNATED TIME**.
2. Do not just send an email and hope it is read in time.
3. **PICK UP THE PHONE** and call the company, talk to a live person, and leave a message for your interviewee.
4. If you are incapacitated and cannot talk or type, have someone do so on your behalf.
5. Send an email apology note. Ask if it would be possible to reschedule.

“Dire circumstances” means you are in the hospital, not just feeling “under the weather.” It means you had a death in your immediate family last night...not five days ago.

ON TIME!

Being on time means you are expected to get yourself to the appointment on time...which means planning your route, anticipating transportation delays, getting lost, etc. Do not be late.

If you are using Skype or a similar platform, anticipate technology problems. Test Skype with a friend beforehand. Make sure your settings are working (e.g., mic on, ready to make or accept calls). Remember to look at your camera and not at the picture of yourself in the corner.

APPROPRIATELY DRESSED!

You are expected to look professional...which means you are wearing a clean, pressed business attire with clean shoes. You are to look as if you are going in for a real interview, and not out clubbing with your friends.

Before You Leave

Before you leave a face-to-face interview, be sure to ask for a business card. Ask if you can connect on LinkedIn. Thank the individual, again. Shake hands.

Hand the interviewee a copy of the “Verification Instructions.” Email the verification instructions to someone you talked to over the phone or on Skype.

Part 5: After the Fact

Send a Personal Thank-You Note

A “personal” thank you note can be hand-written or via email. By personal, it means you are to thank the person for something specific you took away from the conversation that you found particularly helpful or interesting.

If you forgot before, include the “Verification Instructions” form as an attachment to the email. Kindly remind the individual you spoke with to verify your conversation with the School of Business.

Check with the School of Business to see if your verification form has been received. If it has not been received after 2 weeks, send a very gentle reminder email.

Dear _____ (*name*):

Thank you, again, for taking the time to speak with me about _____ (*xyz careers or a career in abc*). The School of Business has indicated they have not yet received verification of our conversation. I have attached a file with the instructions for your convenience. If you would take a moment to send a verification email to my School, I would be grateful.

Sincerely,

_____ (*your name*)



Informational Interview Verification

All students who wish to pursue a major in the School of Business at Geneseo must complete a co-curricular professional development program. One of the program requirements is an informational interview to help the student explore a career of interest. In order for the student to satisfy the informational interview requirement, we must receive independent verification of the meeting or conversation.

Please complete one of the following options in order to verify your conversation with our student.

1. Email the Director of Student Services, Mr. Del Brown at Brown@Geneseo.edu with the subject line "Information Interview Verification." The email must come from a company email address (no personal email addresses, please.)
 - a. Simply tell us the name of the student you spoke to and the date of your conversation
 - b. Please include your name, title and the name of your company

2. Provide the information below on your company letterhead and mail it to us. Please enclose a business card.
 - a. Name of the SUNY Geneseo student
 - b. Date of meeting or conversation
 - c. Your name, title, and signature

Mr. Del Brown
Director of Student Services
School of Business
SUNY Geneseo
1 College Circle
Geneseo, NY 14454

Thank you for supporting our students. If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to call us.

585-245-5367