Informational Interviewing

What is an Informational Interview?
• The informational interview is an opportunity to learn about a career which interests you, by meeting and talking with someone who is working professionally in that field.
• In a question-and-answer session, you will learn first-hand about a job directly from someone who performs the tasks on a daily basis.

Arranging the Informational Interview
• Your Career Counselor at the VCU University Career Center can help you "brainstorm".
• Use your networking skills to create a list of prospective interviewees. Contact friends, family, current and former supervisors, professors and alumni and ask them for referrals.
• Prioritize your list, based on areas of greatest interest to you and convenience of arrangements. Select two or three prospective subjects to contact.
• Contact the person(s) you wish to interview. Identify yourself as a student at VCU, state that you are interested in the career they have chosen, and ask if they would mind meeting with you for 20-30 minutes to discuss their career and to answer some questions.

Preparing for the Interview
• Consider what you want to learn during the interview, and select questions accordingly (see below).
• Dress appropriately for the job you are investigating.
• Arrive 10-15 minutes early.
• Bring a copy of your resume with you in case it is requested. However, don't approach the interview as if you are looking for a job — your purpose is to gather information. Only provide a resume if requested.

Evaluation and Follow-up
• Evaluate your experience. What did you learn from it? Do you have new questions? Did the interview reinforce your interest in this career? How does this career "fit" you?
• Keep names, addresses, and telephone numbers of your contacts for future reference.
• Send a brief thank-you note to each person you interviewed, thanking them for their time.
• Talk with your Career Counselor about your experience.

Suggestions for Informational Interview Questions
• What is a typical day like for you?
• What is the most satisfying part of your job? Least?
• Describe your career path.
• How happy are you with your job here?
• Would you choose to enter this field again? If not, what other field would you choose?
• What would you most like to change about your position?
• What is your educational background?
• What courses best prepared you for this position?
• What professional organizations do you recommend?
• Knowing what you know now about your field, what courses or training would you do differently?
• What are the most valued skills in this field? How can I best obtain these skills?
• What is your biggest responsibility, and how much pressure do you feel from this responsibility?
• How do you feel your salary compares to other occupations with the same educational requirements, skills, and level of responsibility?
• How much travel and/or geographic relocation is required in your field?
• How difficult would it be for you to change to a similar job in another business, industry, or setting?
• What are your future career plans? Are these typical goals for your field?
• What is the most common entry-level position in this field?
• What was your first job in this field? What was the progression of jobs you had in order to get to your present position?
• What is a lesson that you have learned as a professional in this field that you wished you had known when you were a student and/or new professional?
• Can you suggest other people I might be able to interview who have similar career interests?