



MAURICE
HOROWITCH
CAREER
CENTER

NETWORKING AND INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING GUIDE

Approximately 80% of all jobs are secured by networking!!

FOLLOWING IS SOME GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE NETWORKING PROCESS:

- **What is networking and how can it benefit me??**

Networking is the process of developing contacts (people in the fields/companies in which you are interested in working) who may assist you in the job or internship search. If you are not a person who already knows (or whose family is connected with) many people in your career field of interest, *you can* establish these relationships.



A great way to do this is to conduct *informational interviews*, or meetings with people to learn about what they do and what their career field is like (see sample questions further into this guide). Informational interviews can also be useful even if you **DON'T YET** know what career you want to pursue. They can either help you to decide if an occupation is right for you or provide you with advice on how to find work in a field that you have already determined to be a great fit.

- **Who should I contact?**

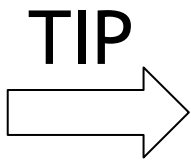
ANYBODY can be a potential networking contact. You may share a cab with someone and have a conversation about her career path. You may speak with your neighbor at the annual block party and learn about the new company that just hired him. Information that can help you make an informed career decision can come from just about anybody!

However, to be more intentional about this, we suggest you meet with a Career Counselor in order to utilize our *Alumni Career Exploration Program (ACEP)*. This is a database of almost 3000 alumni who have volunteered to share information about their career paths with students (read more about ACEP on the following pages). You do not need to limit your informational interviews to Hamilton alumni however. Call up companies you are interested in working for and ask to speak with an employee there. Who do you know who does **NOT** like to talk about himself or herself?

- **Do I just come right out and ask people for jobs?**

Definitely **NOT**! The key here is that you are developing networking *relationships*. If done professionally and courteously, these can be lifelong contacts that you can tap into again and again. Most people will be turned off if you call and simply ask if they can get you a job! Spend the time necessary to ask them questions about what they do, and most importantly what advice they can offer to you with your job search (this is a lot different than asking **FOR** a job).

It is also appropriate to ask if you can keep a person updated on your job search. The more people you keep in the loop, the more chances you have of someone passing a job lead along.



Employers are more likely to hire people they know
(or who know people they know!)
so it benefits you to **KNOW** a LOT of people!

- What do I need to walk away with? How do I follow-up?

The most critical aspect of networking is that your base of contacts expands with each informational interview you conduct!!

Be sure to ask each person:

“Do you know of anyone else in this field who I may be able to speak with???”

If the person gives you names, BE CERTAIN to follow-up and contact these people. (The Career Center has gotten feedback from some alumni that they were disappointed that students didn't follow through with the contacts they gave them.) Then, keep in touch with the original person in the future by periodically dropping a note or calling when you have a question or information to share (i.e. you landed a job or completed an interesting internship). They can often be excellent resources to you throughout your job search: they may be able to keep you abreast of any job leads or continue to offer ideas.

- How important are thank-you letters?

ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS show appreciation to your new professional contact for his or her time and information by sending a **thank-you letter** (in most cases an email is NOT sufficient) *immediately following* (24-48 hours after) the informational interview. If you need help crafting a thank-you letter, please consult the Career Center's *Correspondence Guide* or meet with a counselor for ideas and feedback.

- How should I dress?

This depends on the field. For informational interviews in finance and law you should dress as you would for a job interview; in other words, wear a suit. For most other fields, you are not expected to dress as formally but you should not show up looking like a student! You will rarely go wrong if you wear a suit: remember that this is a chance to make an impression and you will never go wrong if you dress as professionally as possible. If you have any doubts, ask someone at the Career Center.

In order to best learn about and prepare for
informational interviewing and networking,
make an appointment at the Career Center today!

Call **859.4346** to schedule a time
to speak with a Career Counselor.

ALUMNI CAREER EXPLORATION PROGRAM

FOLLOWING IS SPECIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT THIS CAREER CENTER PROGRAM FOR CONDUCTING INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS AND DEVELOPING NETWORKING CONTACTS:

- **What is ACEP?**

ACEP is a program of *career exploration*. It is a database of contact information of alumni, parents, and/or friends of the college who have volunteered to advise students regarding their career interests. The primary purpose of the ACEP program is for participants to provide information about their industry, career field, specific responsibilities, or place of employment. The alumni have volunteered for this program with the understanding that they are providing career information, *not jobs*. However, many students have gotten jobs as a result of an ACEP interview, either at the organization where they initially interviewed or more commonly *from a referral that was given to them at an ACEP interview*.

Students select volunteers from the ACEP database during an appointment with a Career Center counselor. You are responsible for contacting and introducing yourself to alumni volunteers via letter, email or telephone. ACEP interviews are generally held during college breaks, and ideally you should arrange for appointments at least three weeks in advance.

- **Your List of Contacts**

Because volunteers change jobs and move frequently, the contact information that we have may be outdated and you may not be able to reach one or more of the people on your list. Please *first* try to look up the person on your own, *then* contact the Career Center if you continue to have difficulty.

- **Visit, Call, or Email??**

The first “rule” is to adhere to the request of the ACEP volunteer (if they have stated a preference for how they wish to be contacted, this will be indicated on your printout). Otherwise, here are some guidelines for choosing the type of contact:

The **best way** to get the most career information and assistance from the alumni advisor(s) is to schedule a **face-to-face meeting**. A lot of information about a field and an organization’s culture can be obtained through observation and non-verbal cues. For instance, you can observe the level of activity of the organization, how people are dressed, etc. Visiting the organization also makes it possible for the person to introduce you to others in the organization who may be of help to you. In addition, people are generally more willing to make the effort to help someone they have met in person than someone they have only “met” on the phone. This often results in more time spent with you and a greater likelihood of additional networking contacts being given to you.

However, it is not always possible or necessary to conduct a face-to-face meeting. Geographic distance may prohibit you, in which case we advise that you set up an informational interview on the phone. This allows you to ask many questions, though without the above-mentioned benefits.

Email should only be used as a first contact or to ask any quick questions before the interview takes place. Many times it is easier to connect with people via email than over the phone. You may choose

to email a networking letter (see below) to the contact to let them know that you would like to schedule a time to meet. Do **NOT** email a long list of questions and expect the person to get back to you with answers to them. You cannot conduct an “informational interview” via email. A “quick” question for you may require a not-so-quick answer on the part of the advisor. It is important to be respectful of others’ time.

- **The Face-to-face Interview** (*see attached F.A.Q. sheet for more on this*)

Setting up the interview:

Start by sending a networking letter and resume to the contacts on your list (refer to the Resume and Correspondence Guides for help). Your resume should only be included so that the contact can get a sense of your background; it should not be sent so that the person can look for jobs for you or pass it to other colleagues. These materials should be sent (by postal mail or email) 2 - 3 weeks in advance of your desired meeting time. After making the initial contact, follow up with a phone call within 3 - 5 business days of the letter/email. This call will allow you to schedule a time to meet. The more lead time you give them, the better the chance that you'll find a mutually convenient time to meet.

What to say:

Introduce yourself, mentioning that you are calling from Hamilton regarding the Alumni Career Exploration Program. Make your request for a brief meeting to learn more about your field of interest, the geographic area, etc. Explain how you hope they can be helpful to you; for example, you are looking for information about their general career field or about their specific company, etc. Then explore possible times to meet, starting with the potential dates of your visit (give some thought to your availability before you call). If you would like to talk with people in other departments at the same organization, you might ask at this point if it would be possible.

The meeting:

In an informational interview, **you** ask the questions and direct the interview. Therefore you must be prepared with questions. Think before you go to the interview -- What do you need to know about this field? What do you think this person will be able to shed light on? Some possible questions are included in this guide but should stem from what *you* want to know about the field.



An important part of the informational interview is acquiring the names of additional people that you might contact for more information about the field (this is part of "networking"). Use your judgment as to the appropriate time to ask for such contacts. Speak with a Career Counselor beforehand so that you can role play this interaction or better prepare for the types of questions that you should ask.

- **Informational Interview by Phone**

The protocol for a phone informational interview is much the same as for a face-to-face meeting. It is up to you whether or not you want to send a networking letter before calling. You may choose to do this so that the person will be expecting your call. When you call, state your interest in conducting an informational interview by phone, possibly explaining that you are unable to travel to their geographic area. Be sure to ask if it is convenient to talk with them now or if you should schedule a time at a later date to call them back. Then follow the guidelines for a face-to-face meeting. Note that a thank-you letter should still be sent even though you did not meet with them in person.

F.A.Q.'S ABOUT ACEP INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Q. After sending my cover letter and resume, my plans changed and I don't think I'm going to be able to visit these people as originally planned. What should I do?

A. If a change in plans prevents you from being able to visit ACEP volunteers, please make sure to call the people on your list to let them know of your change in plans. Then talk about an alternative time to get together or explore the possibility of an informational interview by phone. *Don't just leave the person hanging; follow-up is critical!* When you do not follow up, it reflects very poorly on you, and jeopardizes the future of ACEP!

Q. I have changed my mind/career direction and no longer wish to speak with someone on my list. What should I do?

A. You don't have to conduct the meeting if your interests have changed. However, if the alumnus/alumna has already received your resume and a letter stating that you wish to meet with them, then you need to call to thank them for their willingness to meet with you and explain that your career direction has changed. Also, if you do not plan to meet with someone, please let the Career Center know so that we can refer other students to that person.

Q. I don't really know anything about these people on my list. Does the Career Center have any information on them?

A. The Career Center only has the information that appears on your sheet. Your best bet is to try to read something about the industry and/or the career field. Second to that would be to try to find web sites for the organizations the people work for.

Q. What should I say when I call to set up the appointment?

A. If you sent a letter in advance (see "Networking Letter" below), then the alumni should be expecting your call. The most important thing to think about is your schedule and what will work for you. Are you familiar with the area that these people live in? Will you be driving or relying on public transportation? Do you know how long it will take to get there from wherever you will be coming from? Are you planning to meet with more than one person in a day?

Once you have some times and days in mind, call and tell the person who answers the phone who you are and why you are calling (to set up a time to meet with so-and-so for an informational interview). It's a good idea to mention that he/she is expecting your call. They may pass you through or offer to set up the meeting time (either is OK). Don't be afraid to say that it would be best if you could meet in the morning (or afternoon) but don't give a specific time unless you have to as you may need to conform to the person's schedule.

Q. I have tried to reach the ACEP contact and can't get through. What should I do?

A. Make sure to leave a specific message, giving your name and your reason for calling. Also, leave the number(s) where you can be reached and when you will be at that number. This is especially important if you are leaving for break. Alternatively, you might ask the secretary/receptionist if there is a good time to reach this person. If you have tried several times to reach them at work, you may call the home number given on your sheet at a reasonable hour (unless it specifically says NOT to call them at home).

SUGGESTED INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

You will probably ask 5-10 questions in any given informational interview, depending on how much time the person has available. Choose your questions carefully, and select them according to what will generate the most helpful information for YOU!

The Fundamentals (these are probably the most important to ask):

1. How did you get started in this field?
2. What do you like about your job?
3. What do you *not* like about your job?
4. With whom else in this field can you recommend I speak? (ask for specific names) May I have permission to use your name when I call or contact them?

Present Job:

1. Describe what you do during a typical work week.
2. What skills or talents are most essential to be effective in this job?
3. What are the greatest challenges you must deal with?
4. What do you find most rewarding about the work itself, apart from salary, fringe benefits, travel, etc?
5. If you were ever to leave this kind of work, what would drive you away from it?

Preparation:

1. What educational degrees, licenses, etc. are required for entry into this field?
2. What kinds of prior experiences are absolutely essential?
3. What did you personally do to prepare yourself for this work?

Lifestyle:

1. What obligations does your work place upon you outside of the ordinary work week?
2. How much flexibility do you have in terms of dress, hours of work, vacation schedule, etc.?

Hiring Decisions:

If you were to hire someone to work with you today, which of the following factors would be most important in your hiring decision, and why?

- Educational credentials
- Personality, personal attributes
- Applicant's knowledge of your organization, your department, your job
- Past work experiences
- Specific skills, talents

Supply/Demand:

1. What types of employers hire people in your line of work? Where are they located?
2. How do people find out about these jobs? Are they advertised?
3. Is turnover high? How does one move up with your organization?
4. Do many people in your line of work accept positions abroad? Where? Why?
5. How much do wages or salaries vary in your line of work (by employer, region, etc.)?

Career Future:

1. If things develop as you would like, where do you see yourself five years from now?
2. If your job was suddenly eliminated, what different kinds of work could you do?
3. How rapidly is your career field growing? How would you predict future prospects?

Advice:

1. How well suited is my background for this type of work?
2. What kinds of experiences, paid employment or otherwise, would you most strongly recommend?

THE CONTENT OF A NETWORKING LETTER

This is to be used as a first contact in setting up ACEP meetings or other informational interviews.

It is acceptable to email a networking letter, and it is advised that this format be used.

Remember, you are asking for a favor; therefore, compose the letter with an appreciative tone.

Your Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Date

Title and Name of Person
Position
Organization
Street Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms./Dr. _____:

First Paragraph: Explain why you wish to meet with this particular person (i.e. you are interested in learning more about his/her field or organization) and mention how you received her/his contact information. You do not need to sell yourself as you would to a potential employer. It is more important to inform the reader how you came to learn of this person's career field or place of employment and how he/she can be of assistance to you. Remember, this letter and subsequent meeting are NOT to be used for job solicitation purposes; rather, you are asking for information and advice regarding your own career exploration or job search.

Body Paragraph: Give a *brief* summary of your background, skills, and career interests as they relate to this person's employment to provide some more concrete rationale for meeting with this contact. Build a case for your interest so that the contact can better understand why you would like to meet with her/him.

Closing Paragraph: State that you would like to set up either a phone interview or face-to-face meeting (whichever is more feasible) and that you need *no more than thirty minutes* of this person's time. Offer a few dates and times that you will be available. You may wish to include your resume so that this person may gain a better understanding of who you are and how your background pertains to what he/she does. If you do choose to send your resume, indicate here that you have enclosed a copy. Mention that you will call to follow up with your letter, but also include your contact information (phone and email address) should she/he choose to get in touch with you. Remember to thank this person for his or her time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Enclosure: resume