INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

WHAT IS AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW?

Informational interviewing is a form of networking that enables you to use your contacts to learn about options in the job market that will help you ultimately find the job you want. These contacts will not be total strangers to you because they will be part of your network. Once you graduate from law school, there is no on-campus interview system in place for finding jobs. Networking and more specifically, networking through conducting informational interviews is one of the most effective ways to get a job once you are out in the “real world.” This makes networking a life-long skill worth developing!

REMEMBER:
Informational interviewing is not interviewing for a job.
It is a method of exploring career options and discovering opportunities which are not publicly advertised.

HOW TO CONDUCT INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

1. IDENTIFY POTENTIAL RESOURCES

Start by developing a list of potential contacts starting with people you already know. Begin with family members, friends, social contacts, previous work contacts, and recreational contacts. Do not forget service providers (your doctor, hair stylist, etc.), as well as contacts through professional affiliations, religious affiliations, and volunteer organizations and activities. Expand your network to include your classmates, professors and teachers, from law school, your undergraduate university, and even your high school. You can even network online through your Facebook friends or Twitter followers!

- Classmates

Many second and third year law students have indicated that they are willing to share their job search information. To find USF law students willing to be contacted regarding their externship or employment experience, visit USFLawLink.com, click on the “Resources” tab. Search for “Student Externships Evaluations” of civil, criminal and judicial externships for student review of previous employers or externship placements.

Lastly, it is easy to network with other USF students - you can even network with your classmates over lunch. Talk to people who grew up in an area you would like to explore.
Chat with folks who worked as paralegals before coming to law school. Find out where their family and friends have worked. Most students are happy to share their connections, knowing that they can ask you for the same help when they need it!

- **Alumni – Law School or Undergraduate**

The job market wisdom and loyalty of USF alumni can lead to valuable career advice. USF alumni, other professional schools you attended, and your undergraduate institution can all be good resources for both informal interviews and actual job searches.

The OCP can assist you in identifying helpful alumni who may have indicated a willingness to be contacted. You can also conduct an online search of USF alumni on [www.Martindale.com](http://www.Martindale.com). Additionally, your professors or college alumni association are also sources of contacts.

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**JOIN THE USF NETWORKING GROUP ON WWW.LINKEDIN.COM**

The Office of Career Planning has started a University of San Francisco School of Law group for alumni, students, faculty, and staff to facilitate mentoring and networking. Alumni members are encouraged to post job opportunities and make themselves available to current students who may be seeking advice and information about career paths. Students are advised to meet with an OCP Director prior to approaching alums to learn the Do’s and Don’ts of informational interviewing. Join the USF Law LinkedIn group at [http://bit.ly/bD69NY](http://bit.ly/bD69NY).

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- **Other Clever Ways to Generate Contacts**

  - **READ LEGAL PUBLICATIONS OR WEBSITES.** By reading newspapers, bar association publications, magazines, and relevant web sites, you can reap two different types of contacts. Scan various publications, newsletters and other information kept in your practice areas of interest for names of significant players or people who write articles that you may find interesting. When an attorney’s work is highlighted in an article, you can contact that attorney and talk to them about their featured work. Or you can reach out to the author of the article. Typically, the writers for bar publications are volunteer practicing attorneys. If you contact the author, letting him know that you liked the article and wanted to learn more is typically well-received and can result in an informational interview.

  - **DIRECTORIES.** You can identify firms, organizations or attorneys that specialize in certain practice areas in various directories such as Martindale-Hubbell ([www.martindale.com](http://www.martindale.com)). The Directory of Corporate Counsel, available in OCP, will list sub-specialties within in-house practices of the larger corporations, as well as the names of the counsel in each of those sub-specialties.
BAR ASSOCIATIONS. Another great place to cultivate contacts is within bar associations. Almost every county and specialty area of law has a bar association and nearly all of them also maintain web sites, so you can find information about them easily. Bar presidents or heads of bar sections (e.g. Litigation Section, Criminal Section, etc.) are great sources of information who may be able to connect you with other members who might be helpful contacts.

Local, state or national bar association membership directories are also sources of potential contacts. A listing of various bar associations throughout California appears in the Employment Options and Resources handout. The American Bar Association maintains an interactive list of state, local and specialty bar associations at: http://www.americanbar.org/groups/bar_services/resources/bar_association_directories.html.

2. HOW TO ASK FOR AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

When you have decided whom you want to contact on your preliminary list, let them know you are looking for help, not a job. When talking to family, friends, faculty or anyone else you feel comfortable with, all you have to do is tell them what you are seeking. A sample script might be: I am interested in working for a small firm in Silicon Valley and would like to learn more about practicing in a small firm. Do you know anyone working in Silicon Valley or a small firm that might have some advice for me?

Generally, people who enjoy their jobs are happy to share general career information along with advice on how to make professional contacts. An email or letter is usually the easiest means for requesting an informational meeting, but you may need to follow-up with a phone call if you do not hear back. At the outset, your email or letter should tell your contact:

- Who you are, your year in school and what school you attend;
- Where you got their name;
- What you would like:
  - an informational interview in person or by phone
  - information about a particular practice area, geographical location, career path (and include a few sample questions to clarify your intentions); and
- When you will call.

Finally, close your letter with a thank you and if you wish to meet in person, invite your contact to breakfast, coffee, or lunch (which you must be prepared to pay for), or request 15 to 30 minutes of their time to meet with them in their office or talk by telephone. (See sample letter in this handout and in the Cover Letters and Other Job Search Correspondence handout.)
Should you send a resume along with the letter?

Here we have a split of authority. On the one hand, since you are asking for information and not a job, including a resume may send a signal that you are asking them for a job. On the other hand, if you do not include a resume, you have less opportunity to get the contact interested in talking to you. If you decide to include a resume, be sure to include some language in your letter such as “To give you a bit more information about my background before our meeting, I have attached my resume.” If you do not send a resume, you should write a slightly longer letter that includes some background information about you.

3. PREPARING FOR AND CONDUCTING THE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Your purpose in conducting informational interviews is to make a general assessment of whether a job or a field is the right fit for you based upon conclusions you have drawn about your job skills, interests and desired working situation. You are also seeking to learn the ways in which your particular skills, abilities, and education may be perceived in this field. If you are interested in a field that does not necessarily require a law degree, but hires lawyers, focus some of your questions on how a law degree is understood and utilized within this organization or job category.

As with any interview, it is essential that you prepare for your meeting. Conduct research about the field and the contact prior to the meeting. The less time you spend asking questions about obvious or published information, the smarter you appear. Your purpose is to build a connection between yourself and the person you are interviewing. Moreover, the more homework you have done, the more impressed the contact will be and the more likely he will be to refer you to someone else.

Consider asking the following questions:

- What is your professional background?
- How did you get your job?
- On a typical day in this position, what do you do?
- What do people new to this field typically do?
- What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?
- What part of this job do you find most satisfying? Most challenging?
- What advice would you give a person entering this field?
- From your perspective, what are the challenges you see working in this field?
- If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?
- Which professional journals and organizations should I read or join that would help me learn more about this field?
- Do you have ideas for related fields or jobs in which I might not have thought about?
Most Important: Are there other people you think I should speak to about this field? Is it okay if I use your name as someone who referred me? (Only ask this if you feel you have established enough rapport and trust with the other person).

During the interview, keep in mind the following guidelines:

- While you should try to get all of your questions answered, allow the contact to discuss what he thinks is important. DO NOT interrupt the contact.

- Respect your contact’s time. Keep the interview to the time limit you initially requested, no matter how well it appears to be going.

- Never ask the contact for a job! Doing so will put the person on the spot and may chill whatever rapport you had begun to develop. Instead, while discussing your interest in the field, make your relevant experiences and qualifications clear. If you have made a good impression, contacts will let you know of any current opportunities they may know of, or think of you should they hear of an appropriate opening in the near future.

- Bring a copy of your resume in case it is requested, but do not offer it unless: (1) the contact asks for it; or (2) you are seeking advice regarding your resume.

4. CONCLUDING THE INTERVIEW

If possible, get names of other people the contact thinks you may wish to talk to in this field, and any ideas he may have for related fields or jobs in which you might also be interested. Discuss the organizations and/or individuals and how you might best approach them. Only use your contact’s name if you have asked and been given permission to do so.

Then be sure to give your contact positive feedback! Thank them for their time and most importantly, you must send a hand-written thank you note or card. In this note, refer to some part of your conversation with this individual, and mention at least one way in which this person was helpful to you.

- After the interview, you may include a resume with your thank you note gently requesting that the contact keep you in mind if she hears of some position for which you might be suited. Be sure however to keep the emphasis of this communication on the "Thank You."

- If you feel like the contact was receptive to helping you, you may want to confer with her on an intermittent basis to let her know you are still exploring the field (i.e., sending her an article of interest or dropping a quick e-mail every few months). Be careful with following up, however, so as not to come across as pushy.
SAMPLE EMAIL REQUEST FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Dear Mr. Smith,

During a recent discussion about my career plans with my counselor, Ms. Director in the Office of Career Planning at the University of San Francisco School of Law (USF), she suggested that I write to you. Ms. Director indicated that you have volunteered to talk with students about your practice. I am a second year law student at USF and am seeking to pursue a career in intellectual property law, with an emphasis on copyright, trademarks and licensing. My interest in intellectual property brought me to USF and the classes I have taken in contracts, trademarks and copyright law have further strengthened my passion for intellectual property.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss career paths in this field with you. As I am interested in one day going in-house, I am certain that I would benefit from your advice as a USF alum and as corporate counsel. I will call during the week of ______ to see if we can arrange an appointment to meet at your convenience. Thank you very much for your time and consideration of this request. I look forward to meeting you and learning about your practice area.

Sincerely,
Sandra D. Secondyear

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The Do’s and Don’ts of Informational Interviewing

**DO**
- Conduct a self-assessment prior to informational interviewing. Explore your interests, values, and skills so that you will be prepared to discuss them with others.
- Be honest with yourself and your contacts regarding your reasons for wanting to talk to them.
- Make contact in an appropriate and professional manner. Call or write to your prospective contact and ask for 15-30 minutes of their time.
- Come to the informational interview well prepared. Dress as if it were a job interview. Bring a copy of your resume but present it only if asked.
- Follow-Up: Write thank you notes. Keep in touch. Remember to update your contact in the future regarding your situation and offer to help them should an opportunity arise.

**DON’T**
- Do NOT ask for a job. Instead, ask for further references or leads.
- Do not be late or skip the appointment.
- Do not stay longer than the allotted and agreed upon time. Honor the time commitment.