

UCEDD Summer Internship Tutorial: How to Make the Most of Informational Interviewing

Planning and preparation are necessary before embarking on a career in medicine or health (or any career, for that matter). OHSU has thousands of medical and health professionals on staff who are willing to share their stories and experiences with students like you. Informational interviews can help you learn more about different careers in medicine and health care so you can make informed decisions about your educational and career path.

The What, Who, and Why of Informational Interviews

What is an informational interview? An informational interview is a meeting with a professional who works in a career that you are interested in learning more about. During the interview the potential job seeker (you) interviews the professional to gather information about their academic and career background and about the work they currently do.

Who should I interview? It will depend on what medical or health-related professions you are interested in. In addition to MDs of many specializations, OHSU employs dentists, physician's assistants, nurses, medical technologists, researchers, public health professionals, social workers and more. There may be professions you've never even heard of!

Why should I schedule informational interviews? The main goal of informational interviewing is to gather information that can help you make a decision about your future career. You will probably want to know the minimum education requirements, what additional work experience may be required, as well as what the day-to-day work is like. Another goal of informational interviewing is to network and make connections with professionals who work in your field of interest.

Before Your Interview

There are a number of ways to research who would be your best contacts at OHSU. Some places to start would be the OHSU website, UCEDD staff, your fellow interns or your own personal network.

Once you determine who you want to interview, start by emailing or calling the individual to request a meeting. Introduce yourself, tell them you are an intern at UCEDD, explain your reason for contacting them, and suggest some times to meet.



Informational interviewing is a form of networking. Maintaining a network of contacts can help with future internships, references, letters of recommendation, and even jobs!



Your own personal network can be a great resource for researching potential contacts. For example, your parents, friends' parents, or other relatives may know professionals who work in a variety of fields.



Before the interview, think about what's most important for you to know and prioritize your questions since you may not have time to ask everything. Make a list of questions to bring to the interview.

Be sure to dress professionally. Bring a notebook and pen to take notes and turn off your cell phone. When you meet the interviewee, shake their hand and thank them for taking the time to meet with you.

What to Ask at Your Interview

You should have a list of questions prepared, but the tone of the interview should be somewhat informal. Feel free to "go off script". Here are some examples of questions you could ask:

Education: When did you know you wanted to become a doctor/nurse/social worker, etc.? What advice would you give someone in high school/early college who wants to pursue this career? What degrees or certificates are required? What college or colleges did you attend? Is it important to have a competitive GPA? How long did it take to finish your degree? Is there any residency, internship, or practicum experience required after you graduate?

Experience and skills: How did you prepare for this work? If you were entering this career today, how would you prepare differently? What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position? What entry level jobs are best for learning as much as possible? What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field? What are the skills that are most important for a position in this field?

The job: Can you describe a typical day? What kinds of problems do you deal with? What kinds of decisions do you make? How would you describe the working atmosphere and the people with whom you work? What do you like most about your position? What do you find challenging or stressful? What is your schedule like? Do you feel you have enough time for your hobbies, family, or other non-work activities?

The profession: What can you tell me about the employment outlook in your field? Which professional journals and organizations would help me learn more about this field? If your job



You interviewee is likely a very busy person. Be brief in your initial communications and return emails and phone messages promptly. Thank them for taking the time to meet with you. Courtesy and respect go a long way!



progresses as you like, what would be the next step in your career? Are there alternative careers a person could pursue with your qualifications? Who else do you recommend talking to?

After Your Interview

Thank your interviewee for their time. Ask them for their business card and if you can follow up with them by phone or email if you have further questions. After the interview, email or (even better) send a thank you card thanking them for the opportunity to learn more about their profession.

For more assistance and questions about information interviewing, ask your internship supervisor or other UCEDD staff. We are here to help you make connections!