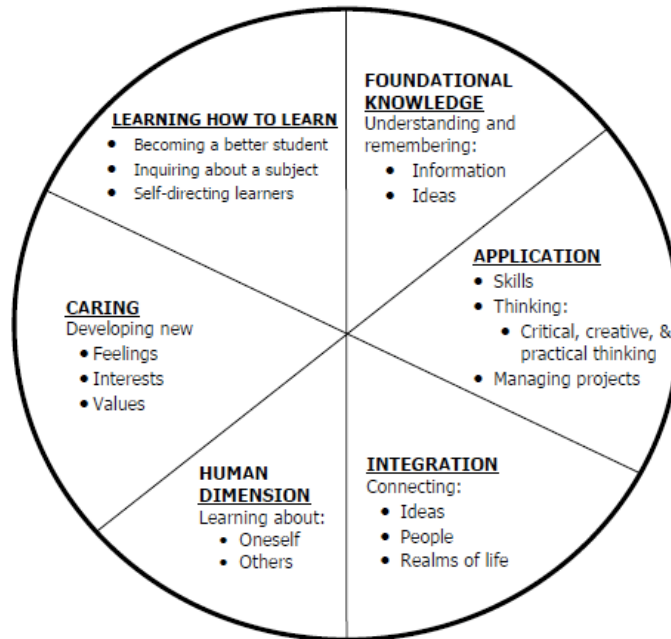


Teaching Enhancement Workshop – January 2016 "Active Learning Strategies for Deep Engagement In and Outside the Classroom" Workshop Resource

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The following is the informational interview assignment given in MK440 Selling Concepts and Strategies. It illustrates the Taxonomy of Significant Learning (Fink 2013).

A TAXONOMY OF SIGNIFICANT LEARNING



Students must conduct an informational interview with a marketing professional who they do not already know using their network to identify and find a person to interview. Students are first given foundational knowledge and skills in class (e.g., communication and questioning skills). They must apply and integrate their knowledge to find and conduct the interview. Then they must submit a reflective paper on the experience. It enacts the human dimension as they learn about themselves and the person interviewed. Through the assignment, students assess their own feelings and interests in the career of the person interviewed (caring dimension). Informational interviews are also a learning and networking strategy that can help break into a career and make a connection in a company but more importantly, connect with another person. This assignment engages students deeply in the learning process taking what is learned within the classroom outside of the classroom. Here are quotes that represent the learning process that occurs among students.

“At first I really hated this assignment, and dreaded doing it. However, now having done it, I found it to be more educational than any other class I have taken. I think you should require more of these informal interviews, for future classes. Being forced to step outside my comfort zone was not easy, but it taught me things that couldn't be learned in a classroom.”

“Not only did I receive plentiful amounts of information on a professional field that I want to pursue after college, I also gained confidence in the use of my professional social skills.”

MK440 –Selling Concepts & Strategies

Informational Interview Paper Assignment

In order to learn more about your desired career as well as to learn how to conduct a cold call and an informational interview, you will conduct an informational interview with a sales/marketing professional and write a reflective paper on the experience.

Please NOTE: *You may NOT interview someone already known to you. For example, even though your dad/uncle/cousin/next door neighbor is vice-president of sales for T. Rowe Price, you may not interview them. Part of this assignment is learning how to use your network and to make essentially a cold call to someone you do not know.*

BACKGROUND INFORMATION¹

An informational interview is not a job interview, nor is it ever an appropriate time to ask for a job. Instead, informational interviews are usually a very brief (about a half hour) exploratory chat with a person who can provide you with valuable information to help you decide which degree or career you should pursue. Informational interviews can give you insight into a field you are interested in and introduce you to other careers you may not have previously considered. With this real-world information and advice, you will be better equipped to hone in on your strongest interests and the most suitable next steps to take.

As you embark on these interviews, you will inevitably expand your network as you develop relationships with professionals in your target field. You will be able to connect with local decision makers and gain referrals to others you can go to for advice. Informational interviews provide you with detailed information about a field, a particular organization, and necessary education, but they also provide an opportunity to practice and hone your communication skills.

STEPS TO CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEWS

Step 1: How to find people to interview

Tap into your network of contacts to help you identify people with whom you should chat. Family and friends are often a major but overlooked part of your network; people you already know can be great sources on information and contacts. Even those who may not share the same professional or educational interests as you may be able to refer you to someone who does. Speak with past professors and teachers, send an email out to everyone in your office to see whom they know, and use your university's career center resources (they often compile lists of alumni willing to act as mentors and/or introduce students to their field).

Remember, you want to find people who work in the roles, organizations, systems, or on issues that interest you. If you cannot find anyone through your own network, look into professional associations. They often have connections in the field, or a strong member base of professionals happy to act as mentors.

Again Please NOTE: *You may NOT interview someone already known to you personally.*

¹ The following information on conducting an informational interview is taken directly from:
<http://www.idealists.org/info/GradEducation/Resources/Preparing/Interviews>

Step 2: Requesting an interview

Before you make the first contact with your potential interviewee, do some background research about both the company and the individual, if possible. Learn ahead of time as much as you about the products/services the company sells, the types of customers they sell to, and any other background information you can collect. You do NOT want to show up to the interview and ask, "So what does your company do?" You should know that ahead of time.

BEFORE you make the call, be prepared and practice what you are going to say. This is your first chance to sound competent, polished, and professional. Whether you are emailing or calling to ask for an interview, here are some things you can mention:

- Who referred you to the potential interviewee (be sure to get permission from your referral to use their name; you may even be able to request that they send an introductory email before you contact the person yourself, so that they may be able to "e-introduce" you).
- Why you are asking them for an interview (be sure to include any specific, positive aspects about them or their work).
- What kind of information you are seeking (information about the organization, issue area, job function, etc.).
- A request for a roughly 30 minute chat, at a time and place of their choosing or by phone if they are not in your area.

Here's an example of what this might sound like:

Hello. I'm Edgar Hernandez. Kathy Liu suggested I get in touch with you to request an informational interview. I've been considering a career in nonprofit finance and am interested in attending graduate school to further my education and qualifications in this area. I received my Bachelor's Degree in finance at Loyola University Maryland, where I served as president of the campus accounting club and helped a local charity improve their bookkeeping practices. Kathy said that you have 15 years of experience in fundraising and development and that you are highly respected among your peers. I am sure you are busy, but I was wondering if you would have time for a short conversation over coffee, or at your office; my schedule is flexible. I'd love to ask you some questions about how you got started, what your educational background is, and the trajectory of your career so far.

Another NOTE: Preferably meet with this person face-to-face. If this is a hardship for you, you may conduct this interview over the phone. Face-to-face is better because making a personal connection with another person, especially someone you do not know is easier face-to-face. But you must speak personally with this person and conduct a formal informational interview.

What if they say no?

It is possible, though mostly unlikely, that the person will turn you down for an interview. Recognize though, that these people are busy professionals. They may not have the time right now or may not feel that they can actually help you. If they have said that they are too busy right now, don't take it personally. Instead, follow up by asking if you can contact them again in the future and, if so, when would be a good time. If they say they cannot help you, thank them for their time and ask if they can refer you to another person in a similar role, field, or organization.

If they say yes...

Step 3: Prepare for the Interview

More than likely, people will be happy to give you a bit of their time. Once you've scheduled the informational interview, prepare yourself well. You will be the one conducting the interview.

You have to research your interviewee, their field and/or organization, and if you have access to their educational history, familiarize yourself with their courses of study! This will be a part of the written assignment as well.

By knowing as much as possible before heading into the interview, you'll avoid taking time to ask questions that you could have found out the answer to on your own; you will demonstrate motivation and respect to your interviewee; and you'll know exactly what kind of information you want to gather from the interview. By the way, this preparatory research is also part of job interviews as well.

Your preparatory to do list should include:

- Researching their accomplishments (try Googling them) and their organization online. Working their accomplishments into your conversation ("I saw that you spoke at the Gates Foundation. What was that like?") is a great way to learn information while letting them know you have taken the time to prepare.
- Finding something that the person has written, a speech they've given, or research they've published, and then developing a few questions about it. The more you show you are aware of their work, the more impressed they will be.
- Preparing thoughtful questions ahead of time (see below).
- Polishing your "elevator speech" (the 45-60 second pitch that explains who you are, what you're looking for and why, and what you are hoping to get out of a particular interaction).
- **Practicing answers to general interview questions that your interviewee is most likely to ask you.**
- Printing out copies of your most current resume and business cards if you have them.
- Dressing professionally (or at least appropriately for the situation).
- Being on time, or even better 5-10 minutes early. Be sure to call if you think you are running late.
- Bringing a pad of paper and a pen to take notes, and a watch to keep track of the time.
- Planning to pay for their order if you are meeting for a beverage or a meal.

Below are some questions to consider asking. Choose the most relevant ones for your situation in advance, and remember that your interviewee may be pressed for time. You will NOT be able to ask all of these questions so choose wisely. Be prepared also to deviate from these questions and ask follow-up questions that allow you to follow your curiosity about their responses.

Interviewee experience

- How did you get started on this career path?
- Why did you choose this type of work—what drew you to it?
- What do you do in a typical day?
- What particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in your job? How did you learn these skills? Did you enter this position through a formal training program? How can I evaluate whether or not I have the necessary skills for a position such as yours?
- What do you wish you had known about this field when you were starting your career? What would you do differently?
- What haven't I asked you that I should have?

Educational preparation

- What are the educational requirements for this job? What other types of credentials or licenses are required? What types of training do organizations offer persons entering this field? Is graduate school recommended? Does the organization encourage and pay for employees to pursue graduate degrees?

- Did your own education relate to this field? What programs and/or schools are you aware of that would be good to enter this career?
- What, if any, graduate degree(s) would you recommend someone in this field getting?
- How well did your experiences in college prepare you for this job?
- What courses have proved to be the most valuable to you in your work? What would you recommend for me?
- Is any other prior experience required?
- What preparation would you suggest for someone interested in entering this field? Is there a particular type of field work or practical training that you would recommend?

Professional field

- What is the best way to enter this field?
- What are the major qualifications for success in this field? Which skills and abilities are most valued in your field? Which ones are currently in demand?
- How does a person progress in your field? What is a typical career path in this field or organization? What are the advancement opportunities?
- What can you tell me about the employment outlook in your field? How much demand is there for people in this occupation? How rapidly is the field growing? Can you estimate future job openings?
- Are there any books or publications I can read to learn more about this work?

Making contacts

- What other local (regional, national, international) employers have positions in this field?
- Who else do you know who is doing similar kinds of work or uses similar skills? What other kinds of organizations hire people to perform the functions you do here?
- Do you know of other people whom I might talk to who have similar jobs? Do you know any alumni from a graduate degree program in this field?
- May I use your name when I contact them?

Ask for advice

- What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field?
- Do you have any special advice for someone entering this field?
- What is the salary range for this position in this area based on my level of experience? How would it change with a graduate degree in the field?
- With the information you have about my education, skills, and experience, what other fields or jobs would you suggest I research further before I make a final decision?
- May I contact you if necessary, in the future?

In preparing your list of questions, keep in mind that when you do conduct the interview, you want the conversation to flow naturally. Refer to your questions without rifling through them.

Step 4: Ending the interview

Be sure to respect the amount of time your interviewee has granted you and end the interview by saying so (i.e., “I see that our time is almost up and I want to respect the 20 minutes you gave me for this interview.”) and thanking him/her for his/her time. Ask for a business card and provide yours (if you have one). If you have a LinkedIn profile, ask if you may send him/her a request to link with them.

Step 5: After the interview: Following up

After you leave, it is essential to send a thank you note. Carry the paper for a thank you note and a stamped, addressed envelope with you to the interview; after you leave, take a few minutes to draft the note. Then as soon as possible, write the note and put it in the mail. While email thank you notes are becoming the accepted norm, hand-written notes often make a more significant impression on the recipient because you took the extra time. Make the note meaningful, and mention something specific that you learned that occurred in your conversation.

When you get home, be sure to record the information you obtained from the interview in a log (Chapter Four of [The Idealist Guide to Nonprofit Careers](#) has a handy Networking Management System template you can use). Jot down some impressions and notes. Look at the Information Interview Paper Submission Guidelines and jot down things you want to remember to say for the paper under each section.

Be sure to keep in touch with your interviewee. Everyone appreciates follow-up, and it makes people much more likely to help you again in the future. By following up, you demonstrate your attention to detail and remind your interviewee that you are a strong candidate for future employment.

Finally, if the person you interviewed gave you the name of a new person to contact, then it's time to begin the process again! Follow-up and contact that person although this is not a part of this assignment. It is this type of networking that gives you a differential advantage in the marketplace. While hiring managers screen on qualifications, hiring a new person is always a risk. Having a known reference/referral source reduces the risk as they have another point of information about you, the opinion of a trusted colleague or friend.

Over time, this process will generate an expanded network of people well-positioned to help you in your next steps toward further education and a career. Understand that, while the information you get from each person gives you valuable insight to the field that interests you and the education required, informational interviews are subjective. Do not limit yourself to the opinions of one or two people; the more people you talk to, the better the chance that you can be confident in your decisions regarding future education and your profession.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

PAPER SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

You will submit paper that will not exceed 4 pages regarding your learning experience in your informational interview. The format should consist of the following:

- A. After your introductory paragraph that sets up your paper, introduce who you interviewed. Please provide a paragraph or two (depending on the extent of the information you found) describing the person you interviewed. This should be information obtained both from your interview and your background research leading into the interview. Also include a paragraph briefly describing the company and its work.
- B. Describe your process in locating this person. How did you go about identifying this individual? What interested you in contacting this person (other than completing this assignment)?
- C. Describe what you learned from this person in detail. Do NOT give a verbatim transcript of the interview. For example, do NOT write “First, I asked him [insert question here]. He answered [insert response here.]” Rather report a summary of the content of what you learned in the interview about this person and his/her position. Describe also the key take-aways of what you learned.

D. Introspection & reflection:

- a. Evaluate the values, skills, and abilities needed to perform your interviewee's job. How do they fit with your values, skills, and abilities?
- b. What did you find most interesting, surprising, compelling, etc.?
- c. How interested are you in exploring this career option further? Has it changed your opinion of the field?

E. Evaluate the experience of conducting the informational interview.

- a. How did the interview itself go, in terms of time spent, conversation flow, connection felt with the other person, etc.?
- b. How did you perform as the interviewer? Describe specific things you felt you did well during the interview? Describe specific things you felt like you could do differently or better next time?
- c. What information do you feel you still need to evaluate this career choice?

Things to remember:

- The paper should be in Times New Roman 12-point font, single-spaced with 1-inch margins. Please include an extra hard return between paragraphs.
- Quality counts. Your writing should be free of grammatical and typographical errors. Spelling and grammatical errors will detract from the credibility of your work, both now as a student and in the future as an employee. I will additionally deduct for errors. So please proofread your work.
- Please include a **title page** with your name, the assignment, date and course number to include the section number. ALSO on the title page, please provide the name of who you interviewed and an email or contact number for this person where I can potentially contact the interviewee should I feel the need to verify that you conducted the interview. This should be a business email, not a gmail or yahoo account if at all possible.
- The structure of the paper should follow a standard essay format with a proper introduction that provides an overview of the paper and a proper conclusion that summarizes and wraps up your findings.
- Try to use this assignment in a way that serves you more than learning about working in your field of interest. Your professional life will begin soon, if it hasn't already. This person could potentially be a good networking contact regardless of your desire to go into the field. Regardless, the firm at which this person works could be a potential employer in the future.