

# NETWORKING

## Hampshire College Career Options Resource Center

Up to 80% of all jobs are filled **without** employer advertising. These jobs are filled by – sometimes even created for – candidates who come to an employer's attention through such means as referrals from family, friends and professional associates, employee recommendations, and recruiters.

You may not feel that you have a useful network of contacts, but **every person you know is a potential source of career information**, including family, friends, and alums. If possible, begin having informal career conversations with people before graduation. Some places to begin:

- **Seek out faculty.** Talk to your professors (Hampshire and Five College), advisors, Div II and Div III committee members. They may have recommendations about graduate schools and/or contacts in the field. Ask what former students with your interests and talents have done.
- **Get in touch with former employers** (summer jobs, internships, work study, etc.). Mention that you are about to graduate, discuss your job ideas and ask for suggestions.
- **Contact Hampshire alumni.** Lists of alumni are available in the CORC library, sorted by field (type of work) and geographic location. If you have graduated and left the Amherst area, contact [corc@hampshire.edu](mailto:corc@hampshire.edu) for access to this information. (Note: alums are usually very willing to help with information and advice, but it is not appropriate to ask them directly for a job.)
- **Talk about your job search with family and friends:** your parents, your parents' friends, the parents of your own friends, aunts and uncles – in other words, anyone you know who is in the workplace pursuing a career. They may have good general advice or specific information, or may know of someone working in your area of interest.
- **Connect with people at organizations where you would love to work** and let them know that, although there may be no job openings at the moment, you would like to be considered in the future. Tell them why you are interested in the organization and what skills you have to offer. If possible, offer your services as a volunteer or intern.
- **Volunteer!** Find an agency or group that needs people with your talents and interests, and get involved. You may meet some people who can be helpful in your job search, or give you useful referrals.
- **Join a professional association**, for example, the American Institute of Architects, the National Association of Social Workers, the Association of Environmental Professionals, the American Chemical Society, etc. Many associations have reduced membership fees for students and recent graduates. As a member you have access to up-to-date information, education resources, networking opportunities, and more. Some associations have employment referral services or advertise actual job openings. You can find a lot of good information about professional associations on the Internet; you may also refer to the *Encyclopedia of Associations* in the CORC library.
- **Attend professional conferences** to meet others in your field. There is often a job board or a job/interview fair at these conferences. Bring copies of your resume and be ready to talk about your interests and possible goals.



---

## Informational Interviewing

Informational interviewing is one of the best ways to get good career information and start building your network of career contacts after graduation. It simply involves talking with people who have knowledge about a career field that interests you.

In a brief appointment, which usually lasts 20 to 30 minutes (maybe less if by phone), you ask questions to learn about such things as pros and cons of the work, the demands, the sources of satisfaction, the training required, the future outlook, how to get started in the field, and more. Informational Interviewing allows you to gain knowledge about the field from an “insider’s” perspective. It can help you decide if you really want to pursue the career field, and give you valuable information and contacts for your job search.

## Steps to Successful Information Interviewing

### 1) Identify contacts.

Think of people who may be sources of career information or job leads. Expand this list of **networking contacts** as you talk about career ideas with your peers and anyone else you meet. Ask your family, friends, professors, doctor, minister, hair stylist – even the person next to you on the airplane – if they know of anyone doing the kind of work you want to explore.

### 2) Ask to meet.

Call or write to request a meeting. Explain how you got the person’s name; if someone referred you, be sure to mention that. When contacting a Hampshire alum, identify yourself as a Hampshire student or fellow alum. Take a minute to describe your background, and then ask if you can make an appointment at this person’s convenience to learn more about her/his career field. Some examples of how you might state your meeting objective are:

“I’ve read books and searched web sites for information on journalism, and I really feel like it’s time for me to talk with someone experienced in the field to get a real-world perspective.”

“I’m planning to move to San Francisco and want to find out everything I can about the Bay area before I start an all-out search for a job in the health care field.”

“I’ve often thought about pursuing a career in theater production, and I’d like to find out more about the field and how people generally get their start.”

“As part of my career research, I’m talking to people in a variety of fields to find out what their jobs are actually like.”

If contacting by letter (or email): Make the letter an example of your best writing. If your writing is careless, the person might respond but not feel comfortable referring you to others. Close your letter by saying that you’ll follow up with a phone call – then be sure to do it. Don’t put your questions in a letter and expect a written reply. That would be extra work for your contact. Besides, you’re likely to gain more from a conversation.

If contacting by telephone: Begin by saying who you are and how you got the person’s name, then ask if this is a good time to talk. If it’s not, explain your reason for calling and ask when you might call back. If you sent an introductory letter/email and this is a follow-up call, ask if your letter was received and restate your reason for getting in touch.

If your contact can’t talk or meet with you, thank her anyway. If it feels comfortable, ask if she can refer you to anyone else in the field, and if you might use her name when introducing yourself. **Be prepared with your questions before you call, in case your contact happens to be free and you have a spontaneous opportunity for a telephone interview.**

Phone Messages: Always give your phone number when leaving a message and remember to speak slowly and clearly. Make sure your own voicemail message is professional.

Confirmation: When you call to set up an in-person appointment, do not hesitate to clarify date, time, location, appropriate attire, and parking availability.

### 3) Prepare as if your future depends on it.

Plan to present yourself in a professional manner. Prepare a list of the questions most important to you (see the attached list of Potential Questions for some ideas). If you are meeting in person be prompt, dress appropriately for that business and be well groomed. Remember to bring driving directions, your questions, pen, paper and resume. Start early – don’t get caught in traffic. If this is a telephone interview, be sure to call on time. Making a good impression helps ensure that this person will remain a valuable networking contact in the future.

If you have a polished resume, bring it with you. Your contact may ask to see it, or you may have an opportunity to show it and get some feedback. Remember that if you do show your resume, it will be to get advice, not to ask directly for a job or internship.

#### 4) Conduct the interview professionally.

1. Listen carefully and try to ask the questions most important to you. Be aware of your contact's time constraints.
2. It is not appropriate to set up an informational interview, and then ask directly for an internship or job. You may ask for advice about how to get relevant experience, how to start your job search, or how to get appropriate training. If you positively impress contacts, they may refer or recommend you when they hear of job openings.
3. At the close of the interview, thank your contact for his or her time. Don't forget to ask if s/he knows of other people who might help you with further information or different perspectives. Provided you make it clear that you're not trying to get a job through this particular interview, it is acceptable to ask in a general way if your contact knows of any job openings, or if s/he would keep you in mind upon learning of openings.

#### 5. Follow up if you want to be remembered.

1. Always send a thank-you letter within two to three days of your visit. Although everyone knows they're supposed to do this, many people just don't bother, making those who do really stand out. Mention parts of your talk that you enjoyed and advice you found helpful. If possible, include what you plan to do with the information you received. For instance, you might be able to say that you have already set up another informational interview with someone recommended by this contact. Be sure your letter is written well: no typos, misspellings, incorrect grammar, etc. Your letter will make an impression, and you want that impression to be positive.
2. Keep a record of all your contacts. You may need to speak with them again at another point in your job search. You can keep networking information on index cards, in a binder or even on your computer – whatever works best for you. Include such data as your contact's address, phone, email, dates of contact, advice offered, names and phone numbers of people they suggested you call, and the date you mailed your thank-you note.
3. Finally, write again in a month or two restating how their advice helped you, and letting them know how your information gathering/job search is going.

---

## Possible Questions for an Informational Interview

Begin the interview by explaining that you'd like your contact's advice about his or her particular field of work. Below are some questions to target certain types of information. Select several that are relevant to where you are in your process. Remember to stay within the time frame agreed upon for your meeting.

### Job and Career:

- What are the duties/responsibilities of your job? What do you do in a typical day or week?
- What knowledge and skills are needed for this job? What do employers look for on a resume?
- What do you think are the rewards of working in this job, and the field in general? What are some of the frustrations and drawbacks?
- What is a typical salary range for this type of work? How high can your earnings go in this field?
- What does it take to be successful in this field?
- What kind of advice would you give to someone considering this field?

### Career Future:

- What is a typical path of career development in this field?
- What is the future outlook in this field? Is there an over-supply of qualified job applicants for this type of work? An under-supply? Is this an industry/field that is particularly vulnerable to recessions?

### Lifestyle Issues:

- What obligations do your work place upon you, outside of the ordinary workweek?
- What are your working hours and travel schedule like?
- How much flexibility do you have in terms of dress, work schedule, vacation, etc.?
- Do you consider your employer – or employers in the field generally – to be family-friendly?

**Career Preparation:**

- What kind of background do I need to enter this field? Is a graduate degree recommended? If so, are there specific programs or schools that are particularly valued in this field?
- How can I acquire the necessary skills? Are there courses or experiences, paid or otherwise, which are recommended?
- What books and magazines could I read to better understand the field? Do you have regular reading that you find useful?

**Job/Internship Search Advice:**

- Do you have any advice for how I might go about finding a job (or internship) in this field?
- How can I identify both advertised and unadvertised openings?
- What is the best way to approach prospective employers? Best timing?
- What other types of employers hire people in this line of work?
- Any advice on developing new job leads?

**Resume Review:**

- Would you be willing to look at my resume and tell me if you think it's appropriate for the jobs I will be seeking? What about the length, paper quality, layout, print-type?
- If an employer received this resume, how do you think she or he would react to it?
- Any suggestions about how I might improve the form and content of the resume?

**Referrals:**

- Are there other people you would suggest I talk to about careers in this field?
- Can you give me contact information and may I use your name?

## Sample Letter Requesting an Informational Interview

Hampshire College Box 6  
893 West Street  
Amherst, MA 01002  
hturner@hampshire.edu  
(413) 559-9999

March 3, 2009

Dr. Maya Valern, Director  
National Conference for Community and Justice  
Connecticut/Western Massachusetts Region  
780 Prospect Hill Road  
Windsor, CT 06095

Dear Dr. Valern:

My professor, Helen Gregory, recommended that I contact you. I am graduating from Hampshire College in May of 2005 and am very interested in doing advocacy work for individuals and communities who have been consistently targeted by oppression. I have visited the NCCJ website and am excited by your organization's commitment to increasing understanding and celebrating diversity through education and conflict resolution. Your experience in this field has led me to seek your advice about a career in this field.

Since the spring of 2002, I have led an educational/dialogue group for White Students Against Racism. Three other women and I who studied with Kathy Simon in her Psychology of Racism course founded the group. Through that course and another, Intergroup Dialogue, I gained an understanding of how institutionalized racism functions within our society, and discovered how I, as a white ally, could actively work for change from a position of power. After learning the methods of informed dialogue and active listening, I gained experience with analyzing and resolving conflict issues in a group setting. Working at a small neighborhood non-profit association taught me about the effectiveness of compromise when an organization is attempting to simultaneously improve a district and satisfy the needs of a diverse group of community stakeholders. The enjoyment and knowledge I gained from these experiences influenced my decision to pursue anti-racist advocacy as a career.

I am hoping that you might find some time to meet with me, to discuss careers in anti-racism with a focus on community advocacy. I would greatly appreciate any advice you could give me. I have enclosed my resume to give you a better idea of my background thus far. I will be calling you within the next week to ask about the possibility of setting up a time for us to talk in person.

Sincerely,

Holly Turner

## Sample Thank You Letter After an Informational Interview

Hampshire College Box 6  
893 West Street  
Amherst, MA 01002  
hturner@hampshire.edu  
(413) 559-9999

April 5, 2004

Dr. Maya Valern, Director  
National Conference for Community and Justice  
Connecticut/Western Massachusetts Region  
780 Prospect Hill Road  
Windsor, CT 06095

Dear Dr. Valern:

Thank you for taking the time to talk at length with me on Wednesday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, about my plans to begin a career in advocacy. I appreciated your willingness to speak so openly about the kinds of qualifications that are desirable for work in this field. Your advice about how to learn more about the field was extremely helpful. As you suggested, I talked briefly with your staff members Shannon Monks and Kim Braden, who were also very helpful. Through them I gained a more complete picture of the projects with which the NCCJ is involved.

I intend to follow up on the many helpful suggestions you made. I am excited by the prospect of meeting with Anna Richards next week to talk about her experiences at the UMASS Social Justice Program. I have written to Mark Peterson, communicating my eagerness to be trained as a facilitator for the MetroHartford Conversations on Race. In addition, I plan to investigate both The ADL and Facing History and Ourselves.

I will make sure to keep you updated on my search for employment. If you hear of any opportunities in this field, or have any additional advice for me, I would greatly appreciate it if you would contact me. Thank you again for all of your help.

Sincerely,

Holly Turner