Overview

• Potential uses for the Career Alumni Network
• What an informational interview is, and is NOT
• How to request an appointment with a CAN volunteer
• How to prepare
• During the informational interview
• After the informational interview
Potential uses for the Career Alumni Network

1. Connect with a contact in a career path that you’d like to work in, so you can learn more about that career path (informational interview)

2. Find contacts at a company you’d like to work for, to assist in the application process (less recommended)

3. Find guest speakers or presenters for a career event

4. Find a host who will let you experience a career in a small way through job shadowing
Why do informational interviews?

1. To develop your professional network for advice, future job opportunities, more contacts

2. To learn more about what someone does, as part of exploring your own career options

3. To test your ideas about a career path

4. To practice your story, and see how it lands - Here’s why I think I’m ready for a move; what do you think?
Why do informational interviews?

5. Because your next career move will almost certainly, in some way, be trace-able to a personal contact.

6. Highly specialized people make career moves with the help of other highly specialized people.

7. If you don’t have those contacts, you must make them.
What is an informational interview?

• Conversation you request
• You’ve defined the purpose of the call or visit
  - Career exploration OR
  - Networking for possible future job application at that company (less recommended)
• Typically 20-30 minutes (longer is great!)
• In person = best,
  phone, videochat = good,
  email = not so good, but better than nothing
• You are in charge of the entire interaction
What an informational interview is **NOT:**

- NOT a way to directly ask for a job!
- NOT appropriate, if you’ve applied to a job at their organization already.
- BUT can lead to a job.
- Here’s the catch: You are networking cause you need information, BEFORE you need a job.
How to find people to interview

1. People you already know (direct contacts) Friends, family, colleagues, lab-mates
2. Contacts of friends, family, colleagues
3. LinkedIn
4. Professional societies, meeting rosters
5. UCSF’s Graduate Division Career Alumni Network (GD CAN)
Hi Wang,

Are you around this weekend? I'd like to talk to you about your job at Genentech and ask you if you know anyone who works in product development whom I can do an informational interview with.

Maybe if your kids are playing in the Central playground this afternoon we could chat while they play, or whenever is convenient.

Thanks, Lou
How to request an informational interview

1. Ask via email or in person
2. Suggest an in-person meeting
3. Keep it short and to the point
4. Offer huge swath of time availability
5. Don’t be offended if they are slow to reply or they don’t answer at all.
Structure of the request

1. Opening, mentioning how you got their contact info
2. Summary statement of who you are & why you are contacting them.
3. Request for meeting, noting specifically what you would like to hear from them.
4. Closing thank you.
Subject: Request to chat, from UCSF Career Alumni Network

Hello Mark,

I received your contact info from the Career Alumni Network at UCSF. Thank you for volunteering to help students like me!

I am currently in my 4th year of graduate school in the Biomedical Sciences program at UCSF, and expect to finish up next year. Although I find basic research fascinating, after I graduate I’d like to find a setting where my work is likely to make more of an impact on human health.

I’m investigating the world of preclinical research, and based on your career information in the CAN database, I thought that you would be a great person to talk to about what it’s like to work in this field and whether my biochemistry and pharmacological expertise would be relevant there.

Would you have 30-45 minutes anytime in the next two weeks for a brief phone call/informational interview? I can be available any time, so if you name a time during the next two weeks, I will call you at that time?

Thanks very much,
Samantha Riley
They agree! Now how to prepare?

- Do online research about them/their organization/their career path
- Draft a list of possible questions
- Plan your opening statement
- Bring a printed copy of your resume
- Plan transportation to arrive early
- Wear neat, professional clothes
Etiquette of informational interviews

• Follow their lead about when and where to meet

• Appropriate to buy them coffee or lunch

• Respect their time – don’t go over without checking in
Your opening statement (60 seconds)

• State your background,
• What you’re currently doing,
• And what you hope to do next.
• Then tell them what you hope to get out of the conversation.
Your opening statement (60 seconds)

Example 1

“I finished my Ph.D. last year in the lab of Dr. V., working on W, and currently I’m a postdoc in Dr. X’s lab at UCSF working on Z. I’m thinking I might like to work in regulatory affairs, so I’m seeking information on what it’s like to work in that field. Can you tell me a bit about your role and what you do in a typical week?”
“Thanks again for agreeing to meet me. As I noted in my email, I’m in the second year of a postdoc at UCSF, and I’ve been speaking to people in career paths that interest me, like management consulting. I am hoping that we can do two things in the short time we have today. 1) I am really curious to learn more about the nature of the work you do and also how PhDs are perceived in the management consulting world, and 2) I’d like to get some feedback from you to find out if my resume clearly communicates how my experience is relevant to management consulting.”
Possible Questions:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your current responsibilities?

2. What are the toughest problems you must deal with? The most rewarding parts of the job?

3. How did you get into this field? What kinds of additional experience or training does one need to get a job in this field?

4. What are potential future career possibilities for someone in your position?

5. Would you recommend anyone else I should speak to in this field? May I use your name when I contact them?
Resources to help you prepare for the conversation:

Read these four articles on Sciencecareers.org
• Networking Part 1: Making the Most of Your Contacts by Dave Jensen
• Networking Part 2: More Networking Scenarios by Dave Jensen
• Opportunities Come Through People, by Phil Clifford et al
• Getting the Inside Scoop on Science Careers by Phil Clifford et al
Keep the focus on THEM!

• Consider yourself a journalist
• Ask lots of questions about them
• People like to talk about themselves
• End meeting with a specific thank you:

“Thank you so much for taking the time to share your perspective. I found your insights about target validation and working in a team-based environment to be really helpful. I’ll also contact Ellen Williams at Genentech by the end of next week. May I connect with you on LinkedIn? I’d like to keep in touch with you as I move forward in this process. And if I can ever return the favor, please don’t hesitate to contact me.”
Why do people agree to informational interviews? From the other side...

1. Because they enjoy reflecting and talking about what they do

2. To mentor the next generation

3. Because people have done the same for them
After the informational interview

1. Thank them within 24-48 hours via email; be specific about what was helpful

1. Sample thank yous may be found in myIDP in the “Talking with People” section under the “Informational Interviews” tab

2. Reflect on what you learned

3. Invite them to connect on LinkedIn

4. Keep track of them and keep in touch

5. They may give you assignments; thank them again when completed
Another sample thank you note

Dear Dr. Shen,

I wanted to write you a quick note to thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you about your experience as a Regulatory Affairs Specialist at Medtronic. After our conversation I have a much better sense of the rewards and challenges of working in regulatory affairs. As you suggested, I will get in touch with Pam Aguilar at Novartis this month. I greatly appreciate your time and do hope to keep in touch as I continue to explore regulatory affairs. Please let me know if I can ever be of service to you.

Warm regards,
Samuel Tran
Resources

• AAAS Career Handbook

• myIDP

• To access the Graduate Division Career Alumni Network: Make an appointment with a counselor by calling 415-476-4986.