

Questions for Informational Interviewing

Use the following as a guide for sparking conversations with a professional contact. Make adjustments to ensure your questions are relevant to the contact and to your curiosities. Note: If your conversation is scheduled in advance, research the person and the employer. Reveal your knowledge in the questions you ask.

Contact background: Good conversation starters:

- How did this type of work first interest you, and how did you get started?
- Why did you choose this field?
- Could you trace your time from Colgate to where you are now? What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?
- How did you get your job?
- Why did you decide to work for this company/organization?
- If you could do things all over again, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why? What would you change?
- Does your work relate to any experience or studies you had in college? How does a liberal arts education translate into your work?
- What courses have proved to be the most valuable to you in your work? What would you recommend for me?

Student preparation: Good questions to show your initiative and forethought.

- What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field?
- How do you think Colgate's reputation is viewed when it comes to hiring?
- Are there any written materials you suggest I read? Which professional journal and organizations would help me learn about this field?
- [If you feel comfortable and it seems appropriate:] Would you mind taking a look at my resume and/or cover letter and offering some feedback?
- Do you know of other people whom I might talk to who have similar/different jobs so I can gain a greater perspective?
- Would you be willing to help me prepare for an upcoming interview by asking me some mock questions and letting me know how my answers come across?

Job Function (how does someone spend the majority of their time): Good questions to frame with some advanced preparation work.

- From what I have researched, I understand _____. From your experience,
 - o What is a typical day?
 - o What projects take up the majority of your time? What are the duties/functions/ responsibilities of your job?
 - o What kind of problems do you deal with?
 - o What does it take to be successful in your position? Industry?
 - o What kinds of decisions do you make?
 - o What percentage of your time is spent doing what? Are there busy and slow times or is the work activity fairly constant?

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Job Satisfaction: Good questions to ask after you have established a relationship with a contact. These are often best asked when your contact can speak privately.

- What do you like/find most challenging about working in this industry? This company/organization?
- What interests you least about the job or creates the most stress?
- How would you describe your work environment and the people with whom you work?
- How has your job affected or molded your lifestyle?
- What are the major rewards aside from extrinsic rewards such as money, fringe benefits, travel, etc?

Industry/Field Knowledge: Good questions to ask as you are considering different career fields. These take the pressure off of the contact to feel as though you are just calling for a spot with their employer, but give you a good sense of the industry.

- What are the various entry-level jobs or intern responsibilities in this field?
- What sorts of changes are occurring in your occupation?
- How is the economy affecting this industry? What would be the outlook for this field?
- What are some future areas of growth?
- What are the skills that are most important for a position in this field? How did you learn these skills?
- How important are grades/GPA for obtaining a job in this field?
- What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success in this field/job?

Organization-specific: Good questions to ask once you have honed in on an industry or a group of employers to which you will apply, or are interviewing.

- How does your company/organization differ from its competitors? Who would you consider a competitor?
- Do most entry-level hires start in a formal training program?
- What are the different departments/divisions?
- What are typical entry-level jobs in your organization? How and when are people hired?
- What does the company/organization do to contribute to its employees' professional development? What is involved in training new employees?
- Does the company encourage and pay for employees to pursue graduate degrees?
- Why do clients/customers choose this company/organization?
- What can you tell me about the culture of your organization?
- Is there a basic philosophy of the company or organization and, if so, what is it? (Is it a people, service or product oriented business?)
- Is there flexibility related to dress, work hours, vacation schedule, place of residence, etc?
- How are employees evaluated?

Career Advancement: Good questions to ask once you have pinpointed a career field or secured a position.

- What are your short-term and long-range professional goals?
- How does a person progress in your field? What is a typical career path in this field?
- What is the average length of time for an employee to stay in the job you hold? Are there incentives or disincentives for staying in the same job?
- What are the salaries ranges for various levels in this field? Is there a salary ceiling?
- What are the educational requirements for this job? What other types of credentials or licenses are required or possible? What types of training do companies offer persons entering this field? Is graduate or professional school recommended?

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