

Spark conversations with a professional contact. Make adjustments to ensure your questions are relevant to the contact and to your interests. If your conversation is scheduled in advance, research the person and the employer. Reveal your knowledge in the questions you ask.

Contact background: 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 experiences 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: show your initiative and forethought

- What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for someone 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?
- [If it seems appropriate] Would you mind taking a look at my resume and cover letter and offering some feedback?
- Do you know anyone I could speak with to gain a greater perspective?
- Would you be willing to help me prepare for an upcoming interview by asking me some mock questions?

Job function: explore a typical work day

- What kinds of experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for anybody pursuing a career in this field?
- What is a typical day like?
- What projects take up the majority of your time? What are the responsibilities of your job?
- What kind of problems do you deal with?
- What does it take to be successful in your position? Industry?
- What kinds of decisions do you make?

Job satisfaction: questions to ask after you have established a relationship with a contact

- What do you enjoy or find most challenging about working in this industry? This 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 knowledge: as you are considering different career fields, get a 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 is GPA for obtaining a job in this field?
- What abilities or personal qualities do you believe contribute most to success in this field?

Organization-specific: questions to ask once you have found an industry or employer to which you are applying

- How does your 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 or 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 or customers choose this 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: 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 advance 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?