Why conduct an informational interview?
Consider these specific advantages of an informational interview:

- You acquire specific firsthand information on a particular career.
- You obtain information about a company, an occupation, or an industry.
- It helps you decide on a career path, especially if you are uncertain, and you can learn more about a variety of occupations.
- It pinpoints industries that are booming during difficult economic times.
- You hone your networking skills.
- It increases your self-confidence when interacting with people.
- It enlarges your circle of professional contacts.

The informational interview is an excellent way to check what you have previously only thought about, read, and heard. The person interviewed can offer information that is:

- Up to date
- Specific and related to the local situation
- Personal and subjective
- Reflective of the “on-the-job” atmosphere

How does an informational interview compare with a job-hunting interview?
As in a job-hunting interview, an informational interview is a two-way conversation. However, it generally is more relaxed and informal. The informational interview occurs in a context of extraordinary freedom and control; you define its focus and structure, and conduct it entirely for your benefit. You decide what information is needed, and your questions should reflect this.

Who should you interview?
Essentially, any individual can be targeted for the informational interview. Do not assume that potential employers are the only ones that have good information for you. Look for individuals who:

- Share a common interest, enthusiasm or involvement in some activity or lifestyle that appeals to you
- Work in settings you like (for example: hospitals, politics, business, theatre)
- Work in career areas in which you are interested (for example: broadcaster, stockbroker, criminal lawyer, market researcher)
- Work in specific jobs in specific organizations (for example: newscaster in a local radio station, a stockbroker at a firm, a paralegal in a local lawyer’s office, or a guidance counselor at your high school)

Where do I find these people?
The most obvious individuals include friends, family, and neighbors. You will also want to contact faculty advisors and the Career Education Office to generate potential contacts. Another great source for contacts are H-SC Alumni. They are usually happy to speak with current students about their career field. Schedule an appointment with a Career Coach to start getting connected with alumni.
Are you looking for concrete career information about a particular field or company? If so, then go to two kinds of people: those “insiders” who know you well enough to be candid, and strangers who will give more of a public relations talk, but may possess a broader perspective than your company “pal”.

Are you looking for an insight into the future direction of an industry? If so, then go to a recognized industry expert. Are you hoping that the information will be helpful in identifying additional people to interview? If so, then go to those who are well-connected and can lead you to others.

People are generally interested in talking about what they do and how they do it!

**What do I need to do to prepare?**

Know exactly what kind of information you want. Do not ask something routine that is readily available elsewhere (like the internet). Do your research first! Know your own interests, skills, values, and how they relate to the person you are interviewing. Know as much as you can about the organization for which the interviewee works, as well as the industry in which it operates. Included are questions that will help you conduct your interview. Be familiar with the questions you want to ask, as it will aid you in being relaxed and looking interested during the interview.

**How do I initiate contact?**

Contact the person by phone and identify yourself by name as a Hampden-Sydney student seeking information on a particular career. Explain to the person that you would like to meet him/her to learn about his/her occupation. Emphasize that this is a career that you are considering pursuing. If the person is not able to do the interview with you, thank him/her and ask if he/she knows of anyone else who may be able to help you. If you are having problems arranging an informational interview, talk with your Career Coach.

Informational interviewing is valuable for career networking, gaining self-esteem, and finding out about the real world of work.

**Prior to the Interview:**

- Decide on a career field that interests you and choose an individual to interview
- Explain the structure and purpose of the interview to the professional
- Establish a date, time, frame, and location for the meeting
- Determine what you are going to wear – if in-person. If via phone, find a quiet place with good reception.
- Think about questions you would like to ask the individual and put them in writing

**During the Interview:**

- Explain the purpose/goals of your interview
- Ask at least two questions from each section. Feel free to phrase questions in your own words. Be selective in the questions you want to ask. Only ask questions that are of interest to you and that have not previously been answered or could be accessed prior to the interview (by doing your research). Listen carefully to what the person is saying. He/she may answer one of the questions you have planned to ask later on. It is good to have your questions written down and in front of you, yet you should be familiar with what you want to ask.
- Take notes regarding the answers.
- Ask for a business card to insure that you obtain correct information regarding this person’s title, and name for thank-you note and for future follow-up.

**After the Interview:**

- Send a brief and personal handwritten thank you note to the person you interviewed
- Document your interview by noting the following: Name of professional, Position or Title of professional, Employer’s name and address
Informational Interview Questions

If you need help thinking of questions to ask, here are a few to get you going until questions of your own come to mind. Use only those questions that are pertinent to the career you are researching.

Occupational Environment

- How would you describe the environment in which you work?
- What kind of “lifestyle” choices have you had to make? How many hours do you work in a typical day? Do you take work home with you? How much outside or overtime work is required of your job? (weekends, evenings, etc.) What does this work involve?
- Describe a typical day at work (your routine or duties you perform on a regular basis).
- How many hours do you work in a typical day? Do you take work home with you? How much outside or overtime work is required of your job? (weekends, evenings, etc.)
- How independent can you be on the job?
- What portion of your job involves interacting with others such as co-workers and/or the public?
- What are some of the issues/problems you deal with in your work?
- Could you tell me a little about the management style here? How are promotions decided? What does one need to do to be successful in this field?

Requirements and Experience

- What college courses were most helpful to you in your college preparation?
- What types of tools or equipment, if any, are necessary to perform your job?
- Is special certification, licensing, or an advanced degree necessary to perform your job?
- What personal qualities do you see as important for success in this occupation?
- What is the salary range for entry-level positions in this occupation? What do the salary trends look like for the future?
- Has your work experience differed much from what you expected? In what way?

Benefits and Frustrations

- What are the major rewards of your job?
- What are the major frustrations you encounter on your job? How do you deal with these frustrations?
- What fringe benefits are offered on your job?
- What personal benefits to your career does this job provide?
- What is the salary range for entry-level positions in this occupation? What do the salary trends look like for the future?
- Has your work experience differed much from what you expected? In what way?

Personal Views

- How did you, personally, get interested in this area of work?
- What was your undergraduate field of study?
- Did you have any practical experience or training, other than college, prior to your current job?
- How did you get your current job?
- What strategies would you be using if you were in a job search for this position?
- Is it easy to transition into this field from another career path?

Outlook

- What are the opportunities for advancement in this field?
- What is the current demand for people in this occupation?
- Do you foresee any changes in this demand in the future?
- How is the field likely to be affected by technological changes?
- Is there a high turnover rate. If so, why?
- What types of employers hire people in your line of work?
Advice
- If you were in charge of hiring someone in your line of work, what criteria would you use to make your selection?
- Are there any professional groups that I, as an undergraduate, can join which would be beneficial to me?
- What types of questions should I expect when interviewing for a job in this field?
- Would you mind reviewing my resume and giving me some feedback?
- Is there any advice you would give someone just entering the field, maybe something you wish someone would have shared with you when you were starting out?
- Do you know of any other people in this field who might be willing to talk with me about their experience? Could you give me their names? Could I tell them you suggested I contact them?

Note: The questions you ask and the way you ask them will depend on the information you seek from your interview, the organization for which he/she works, and the tone of the interview. Some questions will be more appropriate than others, depending on the situation and the person.

Evaluate your Findings
Is there a “good fit” between your self-information and the career requirements, or are there differences? If there are differences, how much of a problem will those differences be for you working in that career? Will they be significant enough to make you unhappy or unsatisfied in your profession, or are they minor sacrifices you are willing to make for an occupation you love? Compare and contrast the information you discover so you can properly weigh the evidence in your career planning.

DO's and DON'Ts of Informational Interviewing

DO research the field you're exploring so you have questions to ask.
   Use the Career Education web site and resource room for reaching careers.

DO dress as if you're going to a job interview or as professionals in this type of work would dress. You don't want to embarrass yourself or your contact.

DO schedule about 30 to 45 minutes for the interview and be aware of the time. Watch for cues that it's time to leave, such as glancing at a watch, or winding down a conversation.

DO pay attention to your thoughts, body signals and reactions during the interview. If you feel energetic and excited, this type of atmosphere may suit you. If you feel bored or tired, perhaps this isn't a match.

DON'T ask for a job -- even if you are bursting to do so! You could, however, say something like this: "I really enjoyed meeting with you and learning about your television station and what a producer does. WGJX is the kind of setting where I would like to work. Do you know of stations with a similar work culture that I might contact?"

DON'T book too many interviews back-to-back. Allow flexibility in case your contact chooses to spend more time with you or to introduce you to others.

DON'T just talk about yourself. The more the contact talks about the job, the career steps and the field, the more you will learn. In fact, the whole idea is not to focus on you, but to talk about the contact.

DO ask for names of more people to contact, and if it's okay to use his/her name when you contact others.

DO write a thank-you note within two days of the interview, referring to any particularly helpful or thought provoking information the contact gave you.