Non-Pathways, Part 3:
Informational Interviews and Networking

Use networking to learn more about potential careers and discover related fields. To complement this handout, refer to CareerLAB’s guidelines on Elevator Speeches for networking situations.

**INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS**

Informational interviewing is a key strategy for career exploration and building your professional network. It allows you to talk to experts about their work and career paths. The purpose is not to obtain a job. Rather, informational interviews allow you to:

- Learn about a career field, including its culture, opportunities, and required training;
- Gather information about a specific organization;
- Explore what a particular job entails;
- Receive advice on job search strategies;
- Develop a professional network of contacts; and
- Build your confidence and knowledge for job interviews.

**Arranging Interviews and Following Up**

First, make connections. Look for people working in fields that interest you among friends, family, faculty, and alumni; they can suggest additional people to contact. If you don’t already know the person, briefly introduce yourself and mention how you learned about them. Ask to schedule an interview of up to 30 minutes while emphasizing that you are seeking information instead of employment. Informational interviews are usually conducted in person or by phone; in some cases, they may involve a series of questions over email.

Prepare for an informational interview as thoroughly as you would for a job interview. Research the career field and organization; prepare open-ended questions relevant to the situation; and dress appropriately for the work environment. Try to have a conversation, and remember to ask if your interviewee can refer you to other contacts or resources. Send a personalized thank you note (email is fine) within a day of meeting, and keep them informed about your professional development.

Read the following sources for additional advice on conducting informational interviews:

- Katie Shives, “The Informational Interview” (2014)
- Julie Miller Vick and Jennifer S. Furlong, “How to Do an Informational Interview” (2009)
- Marci Alboher, “Mastering the Informational Interview” (2008)
- Robin Wagner, “Informational Interviewing 101” (2001)
- Columbia University School of Professional Studies’ Informational Interviews
- UC-San Francisco Office of Career & Professional Development’s Informational Interviewing

For insight into the benefits of building a professional network beyond academia, consult these sources:

- James M. Lang, “How Do You Teach Networking?” (2011)
- Robin Wagner, “Why You’ll Want a Mentor Outside the Ivory Tower, Too” (2001)

**CareerLAB Resources**

- BrownConnect is the gateway to connecting with thousands of Brown alumni, parents, and friends.
- Career Fairs take place each semester when many employer representatives visit campus to meet students.
- CareerLAB organizes non-academic job programs for graduate students throughout the academic year. Check the CareerLAB calendar for upcoming events, including GradCON in November.
INTERN, VOLUNTEER, AND SHADOW

After researching careers and conducting informational interviews, consider interning, volunteering, or shadowing to gain experience and determine if a profession or organization is a good fit for you.

Internships/Fellowships
Many organizations offer internships, fellowships, and other short-term opportunities for graduate students. In addition to the listings below, check the websites of organizations that interest you or career sites such as Vault.

- Brown's Student Job & Internship Board (JIB)
- Federal Opportunities for STEM Graduate Students
- Federal Opportunities for Students & Recent Graduates

The following articles provide more insight into interning while a graduate student:
- UC-Berkeley Graduate Students & Internships
- Alice Williams, “An Internship Isn’t Always a Necessity” (May 2016)

Volunteering
Volunteering gives you more control over the nature and duration of your placement. Offer to work on a summer or semester project that addresses an organization’s ongoing projects or outstanding needs. Your commitment can be limited to planning an event or writing a grant.

Shadowing
Shadowing occurs over at least one day and involves unobtrusively observing a person during the course of their workday or workweek. Explore your immediate network for people to shadow, or use BrownConnect or your alumni association to identify someone.

VERSATILE PhD

Versatile PhD is a thriving online community dedicated to helping PhDs and graduate students learn about non-academic career paths in humanities, social science, and STEM. The site profiles PhDs and ABDs who went on to successful non-academic or alt-academic careers, along with actual resumes and cover letters. It also organizes career panel discussions in a range of fields and topics. Access to Versatile PhD is subscription-based and free through Brown. Log in with your Brown email address to get started.

PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL NETWORKING

Use professional social networking sites to increase your connections and market your professional skills and qualifications to potential non-academic employers. The following article provides a convenient overview of online tools that academics can use to control their web presence: Miriam Posner, “Creating Your Web Presence: A Primer for Academics” (2011)

LinkedIn is the most important social networking service for non-academic professionals. Its Alumni Tool can connect you to over 53,000 Brown graduates on LinkedIn. To get started, join one of the Graduate School’s LinkedIn groups for Humanities & Social Sciences or Life & Physical Sciences.

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