

Informational Interviews & Networking

This packet is aimed at showing you how you can benefit from conducting informational interviews and networking. If you need assistance, career counselors are available to meet with you to discuss how to locate and connect with contacts of interest.



Overview • Finding Contacts and Preparing to Meet • Sample Questions • Suggestions & Tips • Using LinkedIn to Network • Follow-Up

Overview

What is an informational interview?

- These involve asking people about the specifics of their jobs and can be great opportunities to learn about a job or field of interest.
- Students in all majors and class years can benefit from connecting with various professionals and exploring careers.
- Conducting informational interviews can help you learn about the specific demands, drawbacks, opportunities, challenges, limitations, and benefits of the field and/or job.
- Informational interviews work best face-to-face in the setting you are interested in working, but can also be done by telephone, e-mail, and through video chat (i.e. Skype).

Common Topics for Informational Interviews:

- Work Environment*
- Ideal Skill Set / Qualifications*
- Industry Trends*
- Interviewee's Career Path*
- Lifestyle / Work-Life Balance*
- Typical Compensation / Salary*
- Challenges / Benefits*

Benefits of Conducting Informational Interviews:

- Discover the “realities” of a particular career field and what it is like to work in a given industry.
- Evaluate whether a particular career/field/job is compatible with your skills, interests, lifestyle, and goals.
- Receive specific suggestions on how and where to acquire the experience and knowledge required.
- Develop confidence in interviewing with professionals by discussing your interests and goals.
- Gather valuable information from industry professionals on career planning and job search strategies.
- Gain access to the hidden job market (many jobs are secured through networking).
- Expand your network of contacts in your field of interest for future opportunities.
- Gain referrals to other professionals in the field to continue networking and locate/create opportunities.

Finding Contacts and Preparing to Meet

How to Find Contacts for an Informational Interview:

Ask friends, family members, colleagues, peers, faculty members, etc. for referrals to contacts who are working or have worked in a field you are considering. Even though you might not know the contact you reach out to, most people are receptive to talking about their jobs and providing advice. One strategy you may employ is seeking out St. John Fisher College alumni. Speak with peers, faculty, staff, and use *Fisher Connects*, *Careershift*, and *LinkedIn* to locate potential contacts of interest.



When Preparing for an Informational Interview:

- Research and read about the career field, company, and contact of interest before interviewing.
- Know about your skills, abilities, interests, values, and how they relate to the career field of the contact.
- Be able to talk about your own goals and provide a brief background of who you are to the contact.
- Prepare several thoughtful open-ended questions to stimulate a meaningful discussion.
- If meeting face-to-face, dress appropriately, be punctual, and work to create a good first impression.
- Be respectful of the contact's time.

Sample Networking Email:

Hi Mr/Mrs/Ms _____,

My name is Jonathon Fischer and I am currently a Junior at St. John Fisher College. I found your name and contact information in the Fisher Connects system during my search for marketing professionals. As a Communications/Journalism major, I am considering a career in marketing, and I wondered if you would be willing to answer some questions for me about your job and the marketing field in the Rochester area. I would be very interested in learning about your career path that led you where you are today.

I would imagine you have a busy schedule and anticipate our meeting only being about 15-20 minutes. You can contact me at SJF568378@sjfc.edu or (585) 385-8050. Thank you for considering to meet with me, I look forward to speaking with you at your earliest convenience.

Sample Questions

Note: Below are examples of questions you may want to ask your contact, but also be ready to talk about your interests, background, and future plans in the likely event that the contact is interested in learning more about **your goals**.

How did you get into this particular career?

How have you grown in your career?

What are some skills and abilities needed in this position/field?

Were there any surprises for you when you entered this field?

What are some of the biggest challenges in this field?

What do you enjoy most about your job and this field?

What advice would you give to someone entering this field in today's market?

What can I be doing now to make myself more marketable?

What specific courses or experiences would you recommend for someone looking to enter this field?

Are there questions I should be asking, but have not touched on yet?

Do you have any contacts that you think would be helpful to me in my search?

Are there any trends or changes occurring in this field?

Is there a definite career path in this field/organization? If yes, please describe it.

This has been very helpful, could you recommend anyone else I can speak with?

Suggestions & Tips

Below are some tips to keep in mind while **Informational Interviewing**.

DO:

- Arrive on time
- Use appropriate and professional language
- Introduce yourself in a concise and professional manner
- Listen actively and learn from the contact's advice
- Come prepared with thoughtful questions when meeting
- Send a thank you letter after meeting with a contact



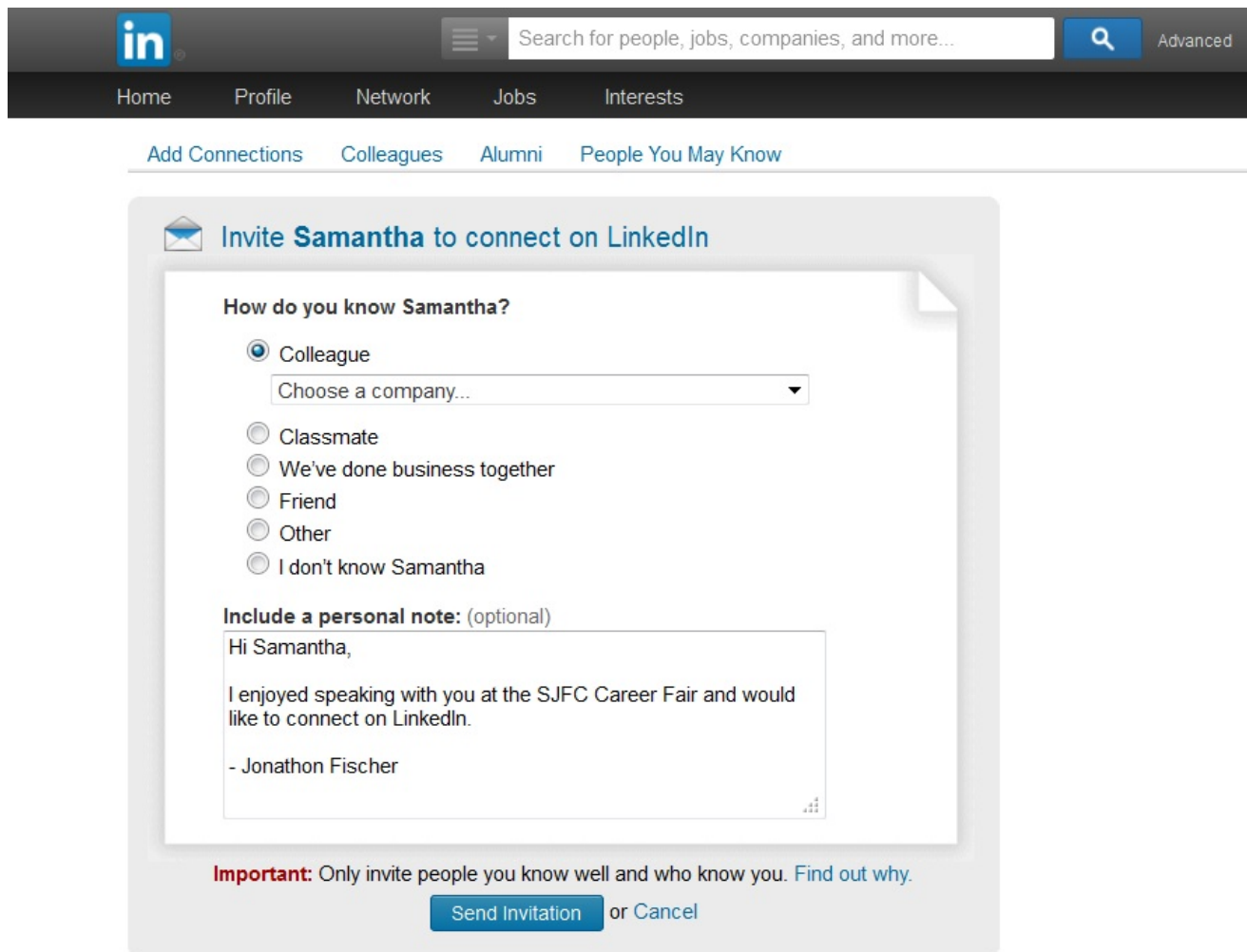
DO NOT:

- Expect or ask for a job or internship
- Forget to listen and write things down
- Disrespect the contact or office staff in any way
- Forget to follow-up with your contact about any updates
- Fail to prepare for an informational interview

Using LinkedIn to Network

With a free LinkedIn account you open up many opportunities to network with other professionals, research companies, locate job opportunities, and promote your skills and expertise to the world.

- Personalize your connection invitations to remind the person how you met and who you are (*See Below*).
- Update your online profile to represent your skills, accomplishments, and experiences in a positive way.
- Include an appropriate profile picture and summary on your page to help others find and recognize you.
- Join groups (St. John Fisher College Alumni Group) and seek out individuals with careers of interest.
- Follow companies and professionals for useful updates and information.



The screenshot shows the LinkedIn interface for sending a connection invitation. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Search for people, jobs, companies, and more..." and a magnifying glass icon. Below the search bar are navigation tabs: Home, Profile, Network, Jobs, and Interests. Underneath these are more specific options: Add Connections, Colleagues, Alumni, and People You May Know. The main content area is titled "Invite Samantha to connect on LinkedIn" and contains a form with the following elements:

- How do you know Samantha?** A dropdown menu with "Colleague" selected. Below it is a text box labeled "Choose a company..." with a dropdown arrow.
- Radio button options: Classmate, We've done business together, Friend, Other, and I don't know Samantha.
- Include a personal note: (optional)** A text area containing the message: "Hi Samantha, I enjoyed speaking with you at the SJFC Career Fair and would like to connect on LinkedIn. - Jonathon Fischer".
- Important:** Only invite people you know well and who know you. [Find out why.](#)
- Buttons: "Send Invitation" and "Cancel".

Follow-Up

It is important that you keep your networking contacts informed about your accomplishments and progress.

Be sure to send a thank you note after an informational interview to thank individuals for their time and advice.

It is also a good idea to send notes to those who assist you along the way and keep them informed of your progress (e.g. I am graduating next month and have started a fulltime job search for _____ etc.)



In your Thank You Letter (email or note):

- Express your appreciation and thank the contact.
- Provide follow-up questions and/or comments based on topics discussed during your meeting.
- Personalize your correspondence by keying in on something specific from your conversation.
- Reference something you learned and/or found informative.
- Be sure to follow through with anything that you agree or commit to during a conversation.

For more information and/or to meet with a career counselor please contact the Career Center:



Email: career@sjfc.edu

Phone: (585) 385-8050

Location: Lavery Library Ground Floor, Room 104