

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Informational interviews are an essential part of career planning and your job search strategy. In addition to helping you learn about different types of legal practice, they are a great way to build your professional network. As a new law student, your primary focus should be on educating yourself about the legal field. *Be sure to wait until you have met with your career advisor to prepare a legal resume before distributing your pre-law version.*

Why Conduct Informational Interviews?

- Find out about different practice areas and settings from people in-the-know.
- Determine whether your personality and style is suited to a particular kind of practice.
- Increase your knowledge of a practice area to convey more effectively your interest and professionalism when you apply for jobs – use the information you gather to improve your cover letters and be more articulate in interviews.
- Get information specific to your needs and interests.
- Learn about different geographic markets.
- Practice your interviewing skills.
- Build your network of professional contacts.
- Find out what you are not interested in and narrow down your options.
- Position yourself for jobs when an opening or referral opportunity arises – you will have made a great impression with your questions and professionalism.

Informational Interviewing Step-by-Step

First, figure out whom to contact:

- Identify practice areas that sound appealing to you. Resources for practice area exploration are on the Career Center website (www.gwlawcareers.org).
- Identify attorneys in those areas using the resources listed in the handout “Resources for Identifying Professional Contacts,” which is available on the Career Center website, and by reviewing employer websites. You will learn about these and additional resources when you meet with your career advisor and/or attend a Career Center workshop on Informational Interviewing.
- Follow up with attorneys who participated at law school events, or other lawyers you may know through friends, family, former employers, etc.
- Locate GWU Law Alumni on Linked In. You can also join the GWU Law Student-Alumni group now and ask your career advisor to connect you with other attorneys who are alumni of the law school.

- Contact your college career services office for alumni who are practicing attorneys.
- Read news and law journal articles about your areas of interest to learn who is writing and speaking about issues in the field.
- Talk to professors who teach in those areas to learn whose work they respect.
- Identify, other students with similar interests and who may have had jobs or internships in your areas or interest. Student groups are a great way to meet like-minded students.

Second, set up the interview:

- Contact the person you want to meet. A letter or email is more considerate than a phone call, and more likely to result in a meeting, as it allows the person time to think about your request.
- Mention the mutual acquaintance that referred you, if applicable.
- If you wish, you may attach your resume by way of background.
- Explain your purpose: To learn more about her work, her field, her career path, the legal market in a specific location, and advice on a job search; remember you are not requesting a job interview.
- Request a brief (10-15 minutes) phone conversation or meeting. You may feel more comfortable asking to connect by phone, rather than in person.
- If you don't get a response to your initial request, try again. Many attorneys are very busy and despite their best intentions, may overlook or forget about your first email. It is fine to politely reach out again.

Third, conduct the interview:

- Before the interview, research the person you will be meeting, as well as the firm or organization. Don't waste time on things you could find out easily on your own.
- Prepare useful questions in advance to make the most of the opportunity. Suggested questions are listed below.
- Bring a pen and paper with you to write down contact names and other information you may obtain in the interview. It is not recommended that you take notes on your phone, tablet, or laptop.
- Feel free to ask for advice on how to improve your resume, but only leave a copy if you are asked for it.
- At the end of the interview, ask for suggestions for others with whom you should contact for additional information.
- Dress professionally and be on time. Don't overstay – unless specifically invited.

Fourth, follow up:

- Always send a thank you note or email expressing your appreciation for his or her time and the information provided. A sincere thank you note will increase the chances that the person will put you in touch with others who might be helpful to

you. Not only that, your contact information will be at-the-ready when a great opportunity comes up. See below for sample thank-you note language.

- Make sure to follow-up on any suggestions and/or contacts while the information is still fresh in your mind.
- Keep in touch with your contact letting him or her know of your progress.
 - Did you read the article(s) suggested?
 - Did you meet with the person/people he or she recommended?
 - Forward interesting articles or information related to your conversation. This will keep you on the radar screen and underscore your interest in a particular legal topic.
 - Definitely let your contact know when you accept a job – one day you may be able to return the favor!

Sample Requests for Informational Interviews

First-year student:

Dear Mr. _____:

My name is [Your Name], and I am a first-year student at The George Washington University Law School. [Mutual Acquaintance] suggested that I contact you and sends her regards. I understand that you specialize in [practice area] and I am extremely interested in learning more about your work and your career path, since I am considering a career in [practice area] when I graduate from law school.

I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet with you in person or over the phone to obtain your career advice. I am free any afternoon next week and promise not to take up more than fifteen minutes of your time!

Thank you in advance and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

All the best,

[Your Name]

* * * *

Rising second-year student:

Dear Ms. ____:

This spring, I completed my first year at The George Washington University Law School and this summer will be working as judicial intern in the D.C. Superior Court. I plan to work in federal government after law school and would like to learn more about the Department of Justice Summer Law Intern Program. Jason Mack suggested that I contact you to see if you would be willing to meet with me to offer any advice or guidance regarding my career aspirations. I would welcome the opportunity to get together for lunch or coffee and can meet at your earliest convenience. Thank you in advance and I look forward to hearing from you.

With much appreciation,

[Your Name]

Sample Informational Interview Questions

Note that many of these questions will be more appropriate as you become better informed about the legal field and begin to focus on a particular practice area or type of employer.

General Questions

- How did you get your job at (organization name)?
- Were you a summer associate/lateral hire?
- Did you have particular skills/background in the area in which you are working?
- What led you to choose your particular career path?
- What do you wish you had known about your field or practice area prior to starting?
- How have you advanced within the organization? Does your organization promote from within?
- How do you envision your future career path?
- What exactly does a (practice area) attorney do? What are the different aspects of the job? What do you do on a typical day?
- As a judicial clerk, how do you spend your day? Do you get to spend time with the judge, perform research, or attend court?
- What is the philosophy of your organization? Does your organization have employee training and support?
- What does your organization look for when hiring new attorneys/laterals/law clerks? What traits does a successful applicant possess?
- How is the job market for (career field) in (geographic location)? Are there areas of the law in (geographic location) that are considered “hot” or “up and coming” these days?

- What advice do you have for a recent graduate seeking to enter this field?
- Are there any professional associations I should join that would put me in contact with other attorneys practicing in your area or other women attorneys/minority attorneys/second-career attorneys/international attorneys?
- What is the typical salary range for a (position) with a (small/medium/large organization) in (geographic location)?
- Would you be willing to review my resume and provide feedback? (Follow up by updating your resume, incorporating the suggestions and sending him/her a copy).
- Do you know of any other individuals who might be able to assist me?

Interviewing Skills

- What qualities and skills are lawyers looking for when considering law students for positions?
- What do you believe are the hardest interview questions to answer?
- What are the most important things I should remember in preparing for an interview?

Professional Development

- What professional associations have you found most valuable?
- What kind of professional enrichment activities (i.e. CLEs, conferences, subsequent education) have you found to be most beneficial?
- What publications or newspapers do you read?
- Are there particular government agency internships that would be useful for a future practitioner in your field to pursue?

Law School Career Planning

- What are things I could be doing now to become more familiar with your area of practice?
- What are some experiences or activities that you pursued as a law student to prepare for legal practice and/or a particular legal field?
- What skills should I be building to be successful in this type of practice?

Getting the Most Out of My 1L and 2L Summers

- If I'm unsure about my practice area interests, what are some ways you might suggest I investigate the available options?
- What should I be gathering or learning during my 1L and 2L summers to help make informed career decisions?

Mentoring

- How would you recommend finding attorneys who might be interested in mentoring?
- If you have been in a mentoring relationship, what is the most important thing you learned and what advice would you pass along?

Perspective

- What are some things you wish you knew about the practice of law before graduation?
- What do you find most rewarding and/or challenging about the practice of law?
- What do you find least rewarding or challenging?

Quality of Life

- Do you have any suggestions on how to balance work and other commitments, both personal and professional?
- Please tell me a little about how you deal with client demands, how much control you have over your schedule, or whether your hours are predictable.
- Do you feel that hours or time at work depends upon practice area, size of employer or being in the public vs. private sector?

Follow Up After an Informational Interview

Always send a thank-you note within 24 hours of your meeting or conversation.

Example:

“Thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet with me yesterday. I appreciate the information and advice you provided about the market for _____ attorneys in New York. I will follow-up with Mr. Smith as you suggested and I have already called for information about the Women’s Bar Association. Again, thank you for your time.”

Do not forget to let your contact know what happens to you!

Example:

“I am writing to thank you for your generous assistance during my recent job search. I met with Mr. Smith and he knew of several job possibilities. I interviewed with Larry Green at Blue, Clark & Jones and I was offered a position in their _____ division. Thank you again for your help. I look forward to seeing you at the next Women’s Bar Association meeting.”