Exploring by talking with people

Sometimes it can feel like you’re supposed to have it all figured out — what you’re going to major in, what you’re going to do after college! The truth is that our lives can take turns we didn’t expect, the path we start off on ends up somewhere new, and the real day-to-day work in our intended careers isn’t what we envisioned. When making decisions about what majors, fields, and careers might be a good fit, gathering information from others can help.

▶ informational interviewing

▶ A 10-30 minute meeting you arrange with someone in your field of interest. It allows you to ask questions, build relationships, expand your network, and explore possible career paths.

▶ Connect with professionals in the field by using your network and resources. LinkedIn, friends, family members, professors, alumni, and networking at Career Exposure events are great options to make those initial connections.

▶ Prepare for an informational interview by researching the organization and the person you will be speaking with (look at their LinkedIn profile!) You will want to develop a list of 5-7 questions in advance to ask during the interview. See page 25 for example questions.

▶ job shadowing

▶ During a typical job shadowing visit you “shadow” an employee at work for a couple of hours, or even a full day. The visit provides you with an up-close look at the workplace and the job from an employee’s viewpoint.

▶ Research the employer and/or industry you will be observing. Be sure to prepare 10-15 questions to ask during your time at the job site. An outline of sample questions you might ask can be found at CareerNetwork.msu.edu under the “Exploring Options” tab.

▶ Take advantage of your chances to observe daily work activities, ask questions, and consider the potential pros and cons of a particular profession or industry. You can also discover workplace skills and career-related experiences that are essential to being successful in your chosen field.

▶ The process for setting up a job shadow is the same as requesting an informational interview, you are just asking for more time. Consider starting with an informational interview and following up with a job shadowing experience to get a deeper look into the field.
Exploring by talking with people

informational interviewing & job shadowing:

- **Learning.** If you want to find out what a specific career path has to offer, what the positives and negatives are within an organization’s culture, or which academic major will best prepare you for a selected career path, why not ask the people who are already working within that field?

- **Building relationships.** In a recent national survey, 70% of respondents reported they got their present position because of a personal contact. The earlier you start building relationships with people in your field of interest, the stronger they will be when you actually begin your job hunt later on.

- **Linking.** See how your skill development, courses, and academic planning can connect to your future success on the job.

finding people to interview or shadow

- **Friends, family, and professors.** You will be amazed at how many contacts you may be able to make through existing relationships.

- **CareerNetwork.msu.edu/Resources-Tools/career-resource-tools** include a searchable database of employers, including contact info (see page 9). You might be surprised how many professionals are willing to talk with you about their careers and professional experiences.

- **LinkedIn.com** is a popular social media platform that’s great for connecting with people who are in the world of work. Use LinkedIn to connect and engage with Spartan Alumni who may be working in an industry you’re interested in. Search “Michigan State University” then see “Alumni.” You’ll be able to sort by major, industry, location and job. (See page 59)

connecting with people

- **First, know your purpose.** Be clear with yourself, and with them, about why a conversation with them will be helpful to you. How much do you already know? How can they help you fill in the gaps?

- **Identify what do you have in common.** Are they a Spartan? Do you have a shared contact? Are you members of the same social organization or network?

- **Ask for what you’re looking for.** Be realistic about schedules and time constraints—don’t ask for a meeting with less than two weeks’ notice or for more than 30–45 minutes of their time for an initial discussion.

- **Social networks.** Are you on Facebook? Twitter? LinkedIn? Do you blog? Social networks grow daily, and new ones are always just around the corner.

- **Attending career fairs** can be useful even if you aren’t looking for a job. Go to career events and check out the **MSU Career Fairs** (see page 63) to connect with employers right here on campus. Then take it a step further with an informational interview or job shadow.

- **Career Exposure Events** offer a great way for you to learn about career fields directly from alumni who are on campus. These events typically have a theme and include a panel of alumni who talk about their career path and what their jobs are like. Students are also given time to ask questions and network with the alumni.

- **Asking about setting up an info interview or job shadow** might happen face-to-face with someone you know or meet at an event—and that’s great. For others, starting with an email request works well. (See the sample email at right for ideas of what you might say). Give your contact a reasonable amount of time to respond (at least one week) and then follow up with a phone call if needed.

- **Hit all the main points.** Explain who you are and how you found them, demonstrate that you’ve already done some research, and request a meeting to learn more.
sample informational interview request

Dear [person’s first and last name],

My name is [your first and last name] and I am a [year in school] majoring in [major] at Michigan State University. I discovered your contact information through LinkedIn. Your background in [industry] is something I would be interested in learning more about. I would like to schedule an [informational interview/job shadowing experience] with you to learn more about your experiences and career path.

Please let me know if you would be available to [talk with/meet with] me for an [informational interview/job shadow] and what dates/times work best for your schedule. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
[your first and last name]