

# Building awareness & confidence

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. Sometimes it can feel like you're supposed to know what you're going to do for the rest of your life!

The truth is that our lives can take turns we didn't ever expect, the path we start off on ends up somewhere new, and the real day-to-day work in our careers isn't always what we envisioned.

When making decisions about what majors, fields, and careers might be a good fit, one of the best ways to gather information can also help you to make professional contacts that can last you a lifetime.

## ✓ informational interviewing & job shadowing

- ▶ **Talking to current professionals** is a great way to determine if a career field is for you. An informational interview is a 10–30 minute conversation with someone working in a position or field that interests you.
- ▶ **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 an up-close look at the workplace and the "real job" from an employee's view. You have a chance to observe daily office activities, ask questions, and consider

the potential pros and cons of a particular profession or industry. You will also discover what workplace skills and career-related experiences are essential to being successful in your chosen field.

- ▶ **The process for setting up** an informational interview or job shadowing visit is the same—for a job shadow, you are just asking for a bit more time. Consider starting with an informational interview, and following up with a job shadow if you want to get a deeper view.

## ✓ 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.
- ▶ **Career research tools** include a searchable database of employers, including contact info (see page 12). You might be surprised how many professionals are willing to talk with you about their careers and professional experiences.
- ▶ **SpartanLinks.** Alumni join SpartanLinks to share their stories and expertise with students. Use your Spartan connections to meet people who want to help you! (See page 59 for more information.)
- ▶ **Social networks.** Are you on Facebook? Twitter? LinkedIn? Do you blog? Social networks grow daily, and new ones are always just around the corner. Tap into your existing friends, followers, connections and readers by reaching out to them for the info you're seeking. See page 59 for more on using social media and networking.
- ▶ **Attending career fairs** can be very useful even if you aren't looking for a job. Go to career events and check out the **Career Exposure Series** to connect with alumni and employers right here on campus. Then take it a step further with an informational interview or job shadow. ▶▶

## benefits

- ▶ **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.



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## ✓ 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?
- ▶ **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.
- ▶ 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.

## ✓ before the visit

- ▶ **Research** the employer and/or industry you will be observing. See information on job search strategies on pages 52-54 for ways to research employers and fields of interest.
- ▶ **Choose 10–15 questions** to ask the employee you talk to. An outline for conducting informational interviews, including sample questions you might ask can be found at [CareerNetwork.msu.edu](http://CareerNetwork.msu.edu), under the "Exploring Options" tab.
- ▶ **Confirm** the time/date and plan for travel to the meeting site.
- ▶ Bring a notebook and pen and **take notes!**

## ✓ after the visit

- ▶ **Send a thank-you note.** See page 45 for information on writing thank-you letters.
- ▶ **Take time to assess** what you learned about the skills and work experiences needed to pursue your career interests. Are there skills you need to gain? What are your next steps?

## sample informational interview request

Dear Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a sophomore at MSU focusing on art history, professional writing, and Spanish. Careers that combine multi-media communication skills with socially conscious work are very interesting to me and I'm currently exploring those kinds of options. I'm a member of MSU's SpartanLinks group on LinkedIn and found you through the Communications, Media & Public Relations subgroup.

Your background in journalism and nonprofit management at the \_\_\_\_\_ Foundation and \_\_\_\_\_ Associates is fascinating to me. I know that you are very busy, but if you have the time, I would love to set up a meeting (no more than 30 minutes) to learn more about how a fellow Spartan got started on this kind of path. I am planning a trip to Chicago for next month—if your schedule allows, I am hoping that I can arrange my dates around our meeting. If a phone conversation would work better for you that would be fine too.

Thank you for your time,

YOUR NAME

## sample informational interview thank you

Dear Nadia –

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me [at the cafe/your offices/via skype] to share your career insights and advice. I was really [impressed/excited/interested] to learn about [issue/trend/opportunity] you mentioned.

Here also is the article I mentioned about some of the ways MSU is seeking to address [whatever issue you discussed]: [www.msu.edu/msutoday](http://www.msu.edu/msutoday). I'd love to hear your take on it if you get a moment.

Thanks again for the investment you've made in me. Best wishes for a great spring; I look forward to staying in touch.  
Sincerely,  
Emma Zimmerman