CONNECTING WITH PROFESSIONALS: Informational Interviewing & Job Shadowing During Break

Congratulations! You’ve finally made it through fall semester. Now, before you start thinking about grabbing your TV remote, putting your feet up, and planning to hibernate the rest of break, let’s talk about career investigation!

Winter break is a perfect time to do some career research, especially gathering information about careers that are of particular interest to you. Job shadowing and informational interviewing are great ways to accomplish this research.

Many think they want to be a lawyer or a doctor, but what they don’t realize is that these jobs are different in reality than on their TV show counterparts. Other students don’t realize the range of jobs that exist. It would be unfortunate to find that out after thousands of dollars and countless hours spent on graduate school; Or, after spending years in positions that aren’t the best fit for your interests, strengths, and values. How do you prevent this from happening? Learn as much as you can about your careers of interest.

A great place to find out about your careers of interest is your very own Career Resource Center (CRC). In the Career Resource Centers you’ll learn about resources to explore careers (e.g. ISEEK, What Can I do with a Major in...?”), use the CANE database to identify alums to contact, and hone your information and networking skills. Use the Career Services’ website (www.csbsju.edu/career) to learn more about possible careers (Exploring Careers).

Having trouble connecting with folks in a career of interest to you? Start by talking with friends, parents, and relatives to see if they might have a connection for you. Use the CSB|SJU alumnæ/ni database (CANE: CAreer NEtwork) located in the Career Resource Centers. Select two to three alums that you could contact. Contact the people you’re interested in and let them know why you’re contacting them and request a time to meet. However, DON’T ask for a job/internship! Information interviewing is NOT asking for a job/internship, but rather about establishing lines of communication to learn about careers. During your conversation, you can ask whether or not the organization offers internships or entry-level positions. Be professional and enthusiastic. Be grateful if they are able to meet or do a phone interview.

Once you have a better understanding of the career, use our helpful handout on “Information Interviews” to select questions you want answered from a professional in the field. Questions might focus on their career path, how they got their current position, their typical day, likes/dislikes about their job, stress they may face, work schedules, what type of opportunities are there for promotion, etc.... If you need help thinking of informative questions you know where to come (HINT: CRC). Typically an employee or professional would love to talk about their career with you, especially if that person is a CSB|SJU alum.

In addition to informational interviewing think about job shadowing. Job shadowing can work hand-in-hand with informational interviewing as it allows you to spend more time in the environment and to more visually understand the person’s work. Maybe you think you could handle the emergency room, but then find out that the sight of blood makes you sick. Job shadowing will help you understand the realities of jobs including what might fit for you and what the challenges might entail as you consider this career.
So before you go home for winter break, start listing the careers or specific jobs you want to explore in a more in-depth way. Then visit the CRC to pick up the Information Interviewing handout, learn how to contact people for an interview or job shadow, and look up alums via the CANE database. Next contact a few professionals and request a time to meet over the break. Send those folks a thank you after your interaction. After you return to campus, stop by the CRC to go over what you learned from those contacts and how to keep those contacts “warm.” Information Interviewing and Job Shadowing are a great way to learn about careers and build important professional connections.

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