Thank you for your interest in becoming a part of our Informational Interview Database. Your participation in the program is greatly appreciated and will have a significant impact in the career decisions of our students; your support will reach students at all three University of Toronto campuses – Mississauga, Scarborough and St. George.

This guide will help you understand what to expect and how you can best use your professional expertise to support UofT students as they explore their career options.

**Program Goals**
The Informational Interview Database has been designed to provide students with the opportunity to explore potential careers. By participating in the program, students will:

- Gain an understanding of key interests, skills, and values that are needed in the career area explored
- Link the transferability (e.g., knowledge, skills) of their program of study to a career area of interest
- Assess whether the career they explored during their informational interview is the career they want to pursue
- Identify the next steps in their career development
- Help students understand that career exploration and planning is ongoing and not a linear process

**Informational Interviewing as Career Exploration Tool**
An informational interview is a 30-minute in-person or over-the-phone conversation with a student who is exploring career options in your field. The purpose of the conversation is to help students understand what a day in the life of your occupation is really like and to help them better understand if this would be a good career fit for them. The real-life perspective you can share with students goes far beyond what they can research online!

**Informational Interview – Best practices**
Remember - you have been chosen for the delicate task of sharing your career related passion and expertise and, at the same time, perhaps offering some guidance to someone who may wish to follow in your footsteps. The following are some helpful tips to set you up for success in your mentorship role:

- While your own story and your own experiences are the reason you were chosen, it's important to remember that, ultimately, the goal of the interview is for the student to walk away with information that might inform his/her own path.
- Think back to when you were a student, or when you were just beginning your life in the workforce – what support or advice would you have wanted to receive?
- Gently ask some of your own questions; your 'inquiring' may actually help the student to uncover some issues they hadn't thought of, or were afraid to raise themselves;
- Provide genuine encouragement. A mentor can be a coach, too!
- If you feel a student may need some additional support outside the scope of your role as an Informational Interview mentor, please contact the Program Coordinator.
Roles and Responsibilities

Your role as a ‘Mentor’
Mentorship is a learning relationship between two or more people and can happen in a wide variety of settings. As a mentor in the Informational Interview Database, you will:

1. Answer a brief questionnaire explaining your personal career story which will be shared in our on-line database for registered UofT students to view
2. Agree to host up to 4 informational interviews a year, either over the phone/Skype or in person (please see below for further information on informational interviewing). The timing and location of the informational interview is at your discretion. Students will use the private messaging function on the database to contact you; your contact information is never shared
3. Provide students with an open and safe learning environment focusing on career exploration - Share your career story and insights about working in your career field and about how you got to where you are today
4. Answer a brief on-line program feedback questionnaire once a year

Career Centre’s Role
• Ensure that students are properly prepared for conducting an informational interview: that they have received and agreed to the terms and conditions of accessing the Informational Interview Database; understand the boundaries of their role as young professional learners and your role as a mentor
• Clearly communicate program goals to mentors and students;
• Be readily available and responsive to students and mentors for any questions or concerns.

Student’s Role
• Prepare for the informational interview by attending the mandatory informational interview training, researching the mentor’s organization and reading any materials sent by the mentor
• Send the mentor a copy of their resume to provide a basic overview of their experience and interests
• Understand that this is a career exploration opportunity and not a job-search opportunity
• Conduct themselves courteously and professionally
• Honour any confidentiality and privacy regulations

Interaction with Students

Mentor Profile
A student’s first introduction to you is your mentor profile. The more information you provide in this profile, the better students will be able to decide who would be the most appropriate person to contact for an informational interview. The mentor profile will ask you a few questions concerning your career path and what you enjoy/find challenging about your current occupation. Regardless if a student contacts you to set up an informational interview, this information will be invaluable to them – a chance to learn from your experience without even speaking to you!

Initial Contact by Student
The student will send you a private message through the on-line Informational Interview Database. You will receive a notification about this message by email; your contact information will not be displayed in the database.

The message sent by the student may be simply to ask you a question about your career story or they may request to have an informational interview with you over the phone, by Skype or in-person. Please refer to the following section for further information.
If you are unable to follow-up with the student’s request due to personal reasons or if you feel the student is contacting you regarding a matter outside the purpose of the program, please notify us immediately and we will follow up with the student.

**Hosting an Informational Interview**

If you choose to accept the student’s request for an informational interview, the arrangements will be at the discretion of you and the student. For an optimal experience, you may want to invite the student to your office, however, depending on your schedule you may prefer to speak with the student over the phone/Skype. We ask that informational interviews only be held in public places. Typically, an informational interview will take about 30 minutes.

An informational interview is not about a student looking for a job, the conversation is an opportunity for students to get feedback or advice from an experienced professional in their career area of interest.

**Common questions from students during their informational interviews might include:**

- What is a typical day or week like in your career?
- What are the most common challenges you face?
- What is the best part of this career?
- What parts do you like the least and why?
- What does your department do?
- What is the work style (e.g. is there a lot of overtime, travel, etc.)?
- How do you balance your job with the rest of your life?
- Do you spend most of your time working with colleagues, clients, or independently?
- How did you get into this career? What would you do differently?
- Are there related career fields that I might consider?
- What are the current industry trends?
- What changes do you anticipate in the next three to five years?
- What is the average starting salary?

**Questions and Feedback**

**Common Mentor Questions**

*Will students send me their resume?* A student may share their resume with you to provide you with information about their schooling, work and volunteer experience. They may ask you to look at their resume and provide feedback during the informational interview. This is not related to job searching.

*Do the students receive school credit?* No. There is no formal school credit. It is, however, an excellent opportunity for students to explore a potential career and understand how their academic knowledge and experience relates to their future career.

*How can I deal with confidential information and privacy issues?* Students will be expected to maintain confidentiality. Some organizations choose to ask students to complete confidentiality waivers.

*Can I screen the students prior to accepting their request for an informational interview?* To have access to the Informational Interview Database, students must complete training related to best practices in informational interviewing. After the training, students are required to read and accept the Informational Interview Database Commitment Form (contact the Coordinator if you would like to review it).

Please advise us immediately if a student contacts you with a question or request that is not in-line with the program goals.
Do I need to evaluate the students? No. This is a voluntary program with no formal evaluation process. We do, however, value your comments with regard to your experience as a “program mentor”, and ask that you complete a brief online program feedback survey three times a year.

How frequently will students contact me? You will only receive a maximum of 4 requests a year. Students are also advised that their request for an informational interview is not automatically granted, and as such, they must take care in drafting their initial message to you. You are also able to deactivate your account at any time.

Why does the mentor profile ask me if I identify with or support diversity groups? We actively seek mentors from a broad diversity of backgrounds with whom students, including those from traditionally marginalized communities, may interact/connect, should they wish. We have found this to be a valuable part of the informational interview experience.

Mentor Feedback
We value your feedback and will be forwarding you a brief on-line program evaluation once a year. This is not, however, a formal evaluation of the student. Your feedback assists us to continually improve the program for our mentors and students. We welcome any informal feedback you wish to provide, as well.

Student Feedback

- I learned how the career would fit my personality and life goals. I learned about what kind of qualities are important so that I can develop those and what I have to do to make myself ready for the job.
- [Informational interviewing] gives me a clearer picture about the potential paths to take as well as the outcomes to expect in each
- I think it helped me to clarify my initial ideas/impressions of the field and what careers were available, which was more 'romantic' at the start.
- I plan on conducting more informational interviews in various fields before jumping into anything. The exploration process can sometimes be daunting but I think it’s a good way to get informed and make a better decision as to next steps than one would have without.

Other ways to get involved!
Please contact us for further information about other Career Exploration programs:

Extern Job Shadowing Program
- The Extern Job Shadowing Program connects students to professionals, like you, in a career area of their interest for a half-day to five-day job shadowing experience in the host’s workplace
- Activities may include: tour of the workplace, attend site visits, observe day-to-day activities, meet with other members of the department, involvement in hands-on projects, attend department and client meetings, and/or receive an overview of the organization and workplace culture
- Placements take place during the months of November, February, and June

In the Field
- In the Field is a one-time half-day event where a group of students will come to an organization to learn about how many occupations within one organization interact with one another to function as a cohesive business
- The goal of the program is to help students expand their range of potential organizations when considering careers and career opportunities
• Through this experience, students will be introduced to the various career paths the organization offers; some obvious, others not so

**Contact Us**
For any questions or to register as a mentor in the UofT Informational Interview Database please contact:

**Libby Whittington**
Coordinator, Career Exploration
T: 416-978-7764
E: elizabeth.whittington@utoronto.ca