

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING:  
A PATHWAY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS AND ALUMNI ENGAGEMENT

A CREATIVE PROJECT  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE  
MASTERS OF ARTS  
IN  
STUDENT AFFAIRS ADMINISTRATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

BY  
KAITLIN A. LONG  
ROGER WESSEL PH.D. - ADVISOR

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY  
MUNCIE, INDIANA

JULY 2016

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE .....	1
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	2
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....	4
Statement of Purpose .....	4
Significance of Study .....	5
Scope and Limitations .....	5
Definitions for the Study .....	6
Organization of the Paper .....	7
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	8
Summary of the Project .....	8
The History and Role of Career Centers in Higher Education .....	8
Contemporary Role of Career Services .....	9
Career Development Theory .....	10
Super’s Life Span, Life Space, and Self-Concept Theories .....	10
Integrative Contextual Model of Career Development .....	12
Career Exploration in College .....	13
Career Development in the College Classroom .....	13
Informational Interviews .....	14
Summary .....	16
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....	17
Statement of Purpose .....	17
Methodology .....	17

Design of Project.....	18
Summary .....	20
CHAPTER FOUR: CREATING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW PROGRAM ..	21
Project Summary.....	21
Semester Timeline.....	23
Informational Interview Program Learning Outcomes .....	25
Email Template to Recruit Faculty Members .....	26
Syllabus Insert.....	27
Sample Assignment .....	30
Script for Supplemental Instructional Video .....	31
Evaluation for Students .....	33
Evaluation for Cardinal Career Network Professionals .....	34
Instructions for Candid Career, an Alternative to CCN.....	35
REFERENCES .....	36
APPENDIX A: POWERPOINT FOR CLASS PRESENTATIONS .....	39
APPENDIX B: INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CCN PROFESSIONALS .....	45

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Career and vocational services have existed in the United States since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Pope, 2000). Since that time, career services have emerged in institutions of higher education and evolved from solely placing students in jobs to providing personality and interest assessments, experiential learning opportunities, and acting as a connection point for employers, faculty, and students (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Garis, 2014; Kramer, et al. 2007). Career development theory is an important foundation for career centers to build their services upon as they work with college students (Tang, 2003). Super's theories of self-concept, life span, and life space (1963, 1980; Super & Hall, 1978), and the Integrative Contextual Model of Career Development (Lapan, 2004), are two important theoretical foundations that can help career professionals understand how individuals move through stages of career exploration and development. As career services in higher education continue to evolve, courses focused on career development have emerged as a way to help prepare students and guide them in their career exploration (Halasz & Kempton, 2000). Another method of directing students through career exploration is by creating specific assignments for faculty to integrate into their courses (Tang, 2003). One such assignment is the informational interview, which allows students to connect with professionals and gain insight into a field or occupation in which they are interested (Bolles, 2016; Crosby, 2002; Orr, Sherony, & Steinhaus, 2011).

#### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this creative project was to develop an Informational Interview Program for use by the Career Center at Ball State University. The Informational Interview Program is

designed to be infused into existing course curriculum across a variety of disciplines at the institution, and could also be a stand-alone program to assist students with their career exploration. It is also designed to leverage the Cardinal Career Network (CCN), an online network of alumni and friends of Ball State who have volunteered to connect and engage with students as they explore potential career paths. Students conduct their informational interviews with an individual they find on the CCN.

### **Significance of Study**

The Indiana Commission for Higher Education has stated that one of its goals for Indiana institutions of higher education is to increase on-time graduation rates. For Ball State University, this means an increase in the number of students who graduate in four years. One reason students do not graduate on time is because they are unsure of what major or career path they wish to pursue. Partially completing coursework for one degree program before switching to another major can push a student's expected graduation date back several semesters. Allowing and encouraging students to explore career paths, especially during the first two years of college, can help accelerate students' college completion. One way to hasten this exploration is by encouraging students to conduct informational interviews. The Informational Interview Program (IIP) is developed within the context of the Career Center at Ball State University, and is meant to provide structure for students to conduct informational interviews, explore career paths, and expedite the time it takes to graduate.

### **Scope and Limitations**

The Informational Interview Program was developed as a way for students to explore potential career paths. The program was designed as a career infusion activity, meaning the Career Center will partner with faculty across the institution to integrate the Informational

Interview Program into course curriculum. Because the Career Center is relying on partnerships with faculty, this could inherently limit the size of the program. In addition to being a career infusion program, the Informational Interview Program has the ability to be a stand-alone resource for students who wish to develop their professional network and explore career paths. Informational interviews can be recommended and promoted by career coaches in the Career Center at Ball State University. It is necessary for a full-time professional staff member in the Career Center to oversee the program to ensure it is running smoothly, communicate with faculty, and address any issues that may arise. It is also possible for a graduate assistant to assist with the management and oversight of the program. Because the Informational Interview Program relies primarily on volunteers through the Cardinal Career Network, the number of individuals registered in this network could limit the number of students participating in the program. For example, each professional in the Cardinal Career Network can be contacted a maximum of three times within 30 days. This measure is in place to ensure the volunteers' time is respected. If the Cardinal Career Network is not populated with enough individuals, or if the professionals are not engaged in a variety of fields and companies, students will have a difficult time completing the informational interview and making meaning of their experience. Lastly, because the Informational Interview Program was designed specifically for the Career Center at Ball State University, other institutions may need to adjust the requirements and processes if they wish to establish a similar program.

### **Definitions for the Study**

*Informational Interview Program (IIP):* A program offered through the Career Center at Ball State University that involves students conducting an informational interview as a way to

explore career options. After conducting the interview, students should reflect on the experience to make meaning of the interview.

*Cardinal Career Network (CCN)*: The Cardinal Career Network is an online resource for Ball State students provided by the Career Center. This network is composed of alumni and friends of Ball State University who work in various fields, and exists so students can connect with professionals to explore potential career paths and expand their professional network.

### **Organization of the Paper**

The organization of this creative project consists of four chapters. The second chapter includes a literature review of the historical background of career centers, the current role of career centers, career development theory, and contemporary practices and programs in career services. The third chapter explains the methodology used in this creative project. The fourth chapter outlines how the IIP could be implemented at Ball State University.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **Summary of the Project**

Career centers have a long history in higher education; they help students understand their skills and interests as they relate to career choices, as well as prepare them for life beyond the university. Contemporary career centers provide students with opportunities for professional development, and assist them by connecting them to potential employers. Career development activities have also begun occurring in the context of the academic classroom. Entire courses are devoted to career exploration and professional development, and some faculty have started integrating assignments focused on career development into their coursework. One example of such assignments is the informational interview. An informational interview is a time during which a job seeker can gather information from a working professional about their specific occupation and career path (Bolles, 2016; Crosby, 2002; Orr et al., 2011). This literature review is meant to provide context for the creation of an Informational Interview Program (IIP) at Ball State University.

#### **The History and Role of Career Centers in Higher Education**

Career services in America date back to before the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Pope, 2000). At that time, “vocational guidance” was the common term used to describe the services offered by career development professionals. The labor force needs dramatically changed in America from 1890 to 1920 as the nation industrialized and Americans migrated to larger cities. Additionally, during this time, vocational guidance was given to immigrants who needed to find work upon arriving in the United States (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Lucas, 1986). In the

university setting, it was originally the role of faculty to assist students in career development and placement (Lucas, 1986). After the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, or G.I. Bill, was instated in 1944, enrollment at American universities surged (McClellan, Stringer, & Associates, 2009). The large number of veterans completing their degrees led to a large need for career placement services, which led to the emergence of career centers on many college campuses (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). At this point, the main focus of career services was to match students' skills with appropriate careers and place them in jobs. However, the 1970s and 1980s brought a shift in career services as Americans began valuing their jobs as something more than a paycheck, seeing careers as a source of fulfillment and enjoyment (Pope, 2000). Career counselors were trained on career development, and the responsibility of vocational exploration shifted to the student. With the aid of a career counselor, the student could develop important pre-professional skills and choose a meaningful career path based on his or her skills and interests (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). Personality, skill, and value assessments were utilized by career services professionals to help students understand their talents and interests, and how to best apply those talents to the workforce (Tang, 2003).

### **Contemporary Role of Career Services**

The contemporary role of a college or university career center is much more complex than job placement (Contomanolis, Cruzvergara, Dey, & Steinfeld, 2015). As labor markets continue to change and technology develops, career centers are challenged to constantly adapt. It has been argued that career services should offer career counseling, assessments, and provide high quality experiential learning opportunities for students such as internships, externships, and other summer experiences (Garis, 2014; Kramer et al., 2007). Additionally, the role of employer relations emerged as a critical aspect of career centers as they strive to build and

maintain relationships with companies and organizations looking to hire university students (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014; Garis, 2014). Common services and programs offered by career centers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century include resume reviews, job fairs, individual counseling, on-campus interviews, and outreach programming (Garis, 2014). Contemporary career centers are expected to do much more than provide quality programming; they are expected to facilitate connections and collaborate with partners both inside and outside of the institution (Contomanolis et al., 2015). As outlined in a National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) journal, the career centers of 2015 are expected to collaborate with alumni relations, development, academic advisors, faculty, researchers, student organizations, and of course, employers (Ratcliffe, 2015). Increasingly, career centers are asked to align their goals and objectives with those of the divisions in which they are embedded. Accurate and informative data and outcomes are critical for career services to remain relevant in the university setting.

### **Career Development Theory**

There are numerous career and vocational development theories that practitioners in career services can rely on as they assist students (Tang, 2003). For the purposes of this literature review, the focus will narrow to include Super's life span and life space, and self-concept theories (1963, 1980; Super & Hall, 1978), and the Integrative Contextual Model (ICM) of career development (Lapan, 2004).

#### **Super's Life Span, Life Space, and Self-Concept Theories**

Super (1963, 1980; Super & Hall, 1978) developed a theory of vocational development that consisted of three main elements: life span, life space, and self-concept. These concepts have become widely used in the field of career services (Niles & Hutchison, 2009). Super (1980) argued that individuals change and grow in their career preferences as their environments

change. He established five different phases of career development that individuals cycle through during a typical life span: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. One begins in the growth phase as a child, fantasizing about occupations and possible careers. As an individual enters adolescence, he or she may or may not be able to connect childhood career fantasies established in the growth phase with their current capabilities or interests. This lack of clarity demonstrates a foundational level of self-concept may be missing (Niles & Hutchison, 2009). The exploration phase typically takes place from age 15 through the early 20's. As adolescents shift into the exploration phase, it is critical they have a basic understanding of self in order to begin collecting information regarding specific career paths (Super & Hall, 1978). Career exploration can be intentional or accidental, and could be self-initiated or initiated by others. Additionally, exploration can be the result of boredom, or managing the stress of ambiguity and uncertainty. This uncertainty, when a person is undecided on a major or career path, causes anxiety and stress, particularly among college students (Fouad et al., 2006; Kaplan & Brown, 1987, Lairo & Penttinen, 2006). When an individual feels confident about a career path, he or she enters the establishment phase and enters the workforce (Super, 1980). The maintenance phase occurs during middle adulthood as the individual continues to advance in their career. Finally, disengagement happens when an individual's interest in their work declines. He or she may be nearing retirement, or in need of a career shift.

Super's (1980) concept of life space refers to the notion that people play multiple roles in life. He argued people play nine different roles throughout their lives: son or daughter, student, leisurite, citizen, worker, spouse/partner, homemaker, parent, and pensioner. Super acknowledged that the degree to which each person feels connected to these roles differs, and

can change throughout a lifetime. The aspect of career is just one role a person may play over a lifetime.

Super (1963) also developed his theory of self-concept in vocational development. He stated that one's occupation should be a reflection of oneself. Our sense of self begins as children, and our identity develops and changes as we grow older. Super argued there are three distinct phases of self-concept construction: formation, translation, and implementation.

Implementation typically does not occur until an individual has completed education or training, and enters the workforce.

### **Integrative Contextual Model of Career Development**

The Integrative Contextual Model of Career Development (ICM; Lapan, 2004) theorizes how young adults develop a more resilient and proactive approach to their career development and future, while also nurturing a sense of self-confidence as they explore occupations and careers (Lapan & Turner, 2013). For an individual to become more resilient and adaptive to the ever-changing needs of the labor market, the ICM suggests one should achieve six vocational outcomes: academic achievement, positive self-efficacy, positive self-attributional styles, vocational identity, confirmation of personally valued vocational interests, and proactive pursuit of one's goals (Turner et al., 2006). The six vocational outcomes are also supported by the development of six vocational skills: career exploration skills; person-environment fit skills; goal-setting; social, pro social, and work readiness skills; self-regulated learning skills; and consistent social support. According to ICM, when an individual is able to develop these skills simultaneously, he or she will be better able to pursue and adapt to careers in which he or she is interested (Turner & Conkel, 2010).

## **Career Exploration in College**

Both Super (1980) and the ICM (Lapan, 2004) emphasized the importance of career exploration. Exploration allows individuals to gain knowledge about a variety of fields and occupations which may be of interest to them. As universities and career centers have evolved, so have their techniques and methods for assisting students in their career exploration (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). Coaching students to explore careers based on personality and interest assessments is still a valid, popular, and informative tool; however, many career centers have also begun partnering with university faculty to infuse career development into college classrooms (Tang, 2003).

### **Career Development in the College Classroom**

Historically, career and professional development in the classroom, such as resume building and interviewing, had been regarded as not intellectually stimulating (Goldstein, 1977; Ryan & Drummond, 1981). However, in a study on career preparation at colleges and universities conducted by Halasz and Kempton (2000), 70% of respondents offered some type of career course at their institution. These courses can be major specific or general to any discipline, and typically focus on career exploration and options post-graduation (Hartz & Parker, 2012). Courses devoted entirely to career development have proven to be beneficial to students (Folsom, Reardon, & Lee, 2005).

Macera and Cohen (2006) created a major and career exploration course in psychology with goals that consisted of: students deciding if they wanted to pursue a major in psychology, informing students of course requirements for the degree program, introducing students to career and graduate school opportunities, and assisting students in understanding the necessary skills to be successfully in a psychology field. The course included guest lectures, resume development,

and a career exploration assignment during which students researched the job outlook, necessary skills and education, and the daily tasks of a particular career in which they were interested. After evaluating the course, Macera and Cohen found the course affected the career plans of 93% of students who took the class. A similar career exploration course for biology majors at St. John Fishers College found students' mean response on a scale of one to five to the statement "I can articulate my intended career path in a professional manner including a discussion of why my chosen career path is appropriate for me as an individual" was a 4.28, or between the responses of "confident or agree" and "highly confident or strongly agree" (Freeman, 2012). Assignments in this course consisted of career exploration research, and resume and curriculum vitae development.

While entire courses devoted to career development have proven to be beneficial to students (Folsom et al., 2005; Freeman 2012; Macera & Cohen, 2006), some career centers will work specifically with faculty to integrate career exploration assignments as part of a non-career focused course. Examples of such can be found at the career center of California State University at Northridge (2016), where sample assignments are provided on the university website for faculty to access and integrate into their courses. Assignments include a Career Research Project and Essay, My Career Plan, and Resume Writing. Appalachian State University (2015) offers similar assignment options for faculty to utilize in their courses, including Self Exploration and Discovery, Major Exploration, and The World of Work. Additionally, Hansen, Oliphant, Oliphant, and Hansen (2009) emphasized the benefits of assigning a mock interview as part of course work.

**Informational interviews.** Richard Bolles originally coined the term "informational interview" (Bolles, 2016; Crosby, 2002). An informational interview is an interview during

which time a job seeker can gather information from a working professional about their specific occupation and career path (Bolles, 2016; Crosby, 2002; Orr et al., 2011). The interviewer should attempt to uncover as much information regarding the professional's career field as possible (Orr et al., 2011). Possible topics of conversation could include educational and skill requirements, job descriptions, working conditions, communication needs, and work experience. The informational interview can be extremely beneficial to job seekers as they explore possible occupations. The purpose of the interview is not to obtain a job offer, but rather to gather data about potential careers (Crosby, 2002). A typical informational interview should last no longer than 20-30 minutes, and the interviewer should develop a list of questions in preparation (Bolles, 2016). Orr et al. (2011) integrated informational interviews as an assignment for a management course at Northern Michigan University. After the informational interviews were conducted, surveys regarding student performance were sent to the professionals interviewed. The response was positive, that students were well prepared and exhibited professionalism during their interview.

Rettenew (2011) conducted a study at the University of Kansas where 29 students enrolled in a first-year experience seminar were given the assignment to conduct informational interviews with eight professionals over the course of the semester. Rettenew wanted to measure career-decision self-efficacy, vocational identity, and occupational engagement of students at the end of the semester as compared to students who were not given the informational interview assignment. While the comparison results were not significant, students who conducted the interviews reported a 40% increase in career-decision self-efficacy, a 78% increase in vocational identity, and a 55% increase in occupational engagement. This showed the informational interviews contributed to students' career exploration and career decision making.

## Summary

Career and vocational services have existed in the United States since the late 1800's (Pope, 200), although their purpose and methods have shifted in response to the labor market, changes in higher education, and technology (Dey & Cruzvergara, 2014). Career center professionals should be knowledgeable about vocational development theories, such as Super's (1980) Life Span theory and the Integrative Contextual Model of Career Development (Lapan, 2004), in order to best assist students. Many college students will move through a career exploration phase (Super & Hall, 1978), and career centers should provide tools and experiences to aid in that process. Courses devoted to career development are a popular method of structured career exploration (Folsom et al., 2005; Hartz & Parker, 2012), and career services have also begun creating assignments for faculty to integrate into courses which are not focused entirely on career development (Appalachian State University, 2015; California State University Northridge, 2016; Tang, 2003). Finally, assigning students informational interviews as part of a course assignment can be beneficial in their career-decision self-efficacy, vocational identity, and occupational engagement (Rettenew, 2011). The remainder of this project will focus on the elements and planning needed to develop a comprehensive Informational Interview Program which faculty can integrate into their curriculum at Ball State University.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this creative project was to develop an Informational Interview Program for use by the Career Center at Ball State University. The Informational Interview Program (IIP) is designed to be infused into existing course curriculum across a variety of disciplines at the institution, and could be a stand-alone program to assist students with their career exploration. It is also designed to leverage the Cardinal Career Network (CCN). CCN is an online network of alumni and friends of Ball State who have volunteered to connect and engage with students as they explore potential career paths. Students conduct their informational interviews with an individual they find on the CCN.

#### **Methodology**

The first step in developing the IIP was reviewing the literature on the history and purpose of career centers within institutions of higher education. It was also necessary to research career development theories, particularly those related to career exploration, to gather information about how college students do or do not make career-related decisions. Research was then conducted on existing informational interview programs at institutions of higher education. While many career centers had resources for students regarding informational interviewing available on their website, very few had a structured informational interview program. In addition to investigating informational interview programs, research was done on how career centers at various institutions are or are not engaging their alumni. It was common for large institutions to have an online database of alumni who volunteered to advise or mentor

students in their career development. Lastly, interviews and meetings were conducted with current Ball State Career Center professional staff to gather information about the program, the manner in which it had previously existed, and how staff envisioned the IIP to exist in the future.

### **Design of Project**

The IIP was designed to be a career infusion program, meaning, the primary method of student participation in the program will be through the academic classroom. By partnering with faculty, students will have the opportunity to conduct an informational interview for course credit. This will increase participation in the program and allow more students to be exposed to the resources the Career Center offers. There are many ways the Career Center can partner with faculty members. One is by encouraging each career coach to speak with their liaison areas about the IIP. The IIP should also be added to the existing menu of career infusion activities the Career Center offers. Lastly, the Career Center should capitalize on existing faculty partnerships by offering the IIP as a way for students to explore career options, build their professional networks, and develop professional communication skills.

Prior to the beginning of the semester, and after selecting faculty participants, the Career Center will need to either schedule classroom visits with each participating class, or offer an instructional video that faculty members could post to their classroom website or online community. The instructional video is a much briefer introduction to the IIP than the classroom presentation, and provides visual guidance to students regarding how to use the Cardinal Career Network (CCN). A good use for the video would be for online courses. The syllabus insert about the IIP and sample assignment should also be provided to participating faculty members prior to the start of each semester.

The Ball State University Career Center is responsible for the development and maintenance of the CCN. In the spring of 2016, over 250 individuals existed in the CCN. The system settings were such that an individual could be contacted by students a maximum of three times within a 30-day period. As the IIP continues to grow, the CCN should also grow accordingly. This can be done by leveraging the existing networks of Career Center staff and the Career Center advisory board, by reaching out to academic departments for contact information of possible alumni who would be willing to participate, and partnering with the Ball State Alumni Center to increase the number of participating alumni. Lastly, a question will be added to the 2016 First Destination Survey to ask each Ball State graduate whether he or she would like to be added to the CCN. This will allow the CCN to continually grow and eventually become self-sustaining.

After a student has been introduced to the IIP, he or she will be instructed to:  
reflect on his or her skills, interests, and values;

- decide which career field, specific occupation, or company he or she would like to gather information about;
- search the CCN to find a professional to interview and initiate contact with that individual;
- schedule the interview;
- develop a list of interview questions for the professional;
- conduct the informational interview; and
- complete a reflective assignment.

These steps and more detailed information are outlined in the syllabus insert which each student will have access to. The course instructor will determine exact requirements of the reflection assignment, which means it is possible for the assignment to vary from class to class.

Lastly, the Career Center will administer surveys at the end of each semester to evaluate the program. One survey will be sent to students who participated in the IIP to gather feedback about their experience with the CCN and to determine if learning outcomes of the program were met. A different survey will be sent to CNN professionals who were interviewed that semester to gather data about their level of satisfaction with the program and interaction with students. It will also be important to gather feedback from faculty members. Because the number of participating faculty is much smaller than that of students or professionals, data gathering can be done informally, through individual conversations and email exchanges with faculty members.

### **Summary**

The Informational Interview Program is designed to help students explore career possibilities and, in turn, increase the likelihood of on-time graduation. The IIP also allows students to build their professional network and professional communication skills. Building the IIP as a career infusion program assures the CCN will be utilized each semester, allows the Career Center to further engage with additional students in a variety of ways, and creates more connection points with faculty across the institution. By increasing the number of professionals in the CCN, the Ball State Career Center can engage alumni and friends of the university in a new way, which could lead to new partnerships and opportunities.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CREATING AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW PROGRAM

#### **Project Summary**

This creative project was designed for use by Ball State University Career Center, and could be replicated by other career centers in the United States. The Informational Interview Program (IIP) is designed to be a program to help students explore career possibilities and, in turn, increase the likelihood of on-time graduation. The IIP could also be used as a stand-alone resource for career exploration. The program allows students to explore occupations, and build their professional network and communication skills. Building the IIP as a career infusion program assures the Cardinal Career Network (CCN), an online network of alumni and friends of Ball State who have volunteered to connect and engage with students, will be utilized each semester. This allows the Career Center to further engage with additional students in a variety of ways, and creates more connection points with faculty across the institution. The design of this project includes the following items:

- Semester Timeline, page 24.
- Informational Interview Program Learning Outcomes, page 26.
- Email Template to Recruit Faculty Members, page 27.
- Syllabus Insert, page 28.
- Sample Assignment, page 31.
- Script for Supplemental Instructional Video, page 32.
- Evaluation for Students, page 34.

- Evaluation for Cardinal Career Network Professionals, page 35.
- Instructions for Candid Career, an Alternative to CCN, page 36.

### **Semester Timeline**

Four to six weeks prior to the start of the semester:

- identify and recruit faculty members who will participate in the program;
- confirm the timeline for each course assignment (when it will be introduced in the class, when the reflection assignment will be completed); and
- send participating faculty members the Informational Interview Program syllabus insert and sample course assignment.

Two to three weeks prior to the start of the semester:

- inquire whether the faculty member would like a report mid-way through the assignment of students who have made contact with a professional through CCN;
- confirm whether faculty would like an in-class presentation about informational interviewing and the program, or would prefer to use an instructional video;
- if the faculty member would like an in-class presentation, the PowerPoint can be found in Appendix A;
- if the faculty member would like to utilize the instructional video, it can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9a2HNTpUN4>; and
- schedule class presentations as necessary.

Weeks one-two of the semester:

- email all CCN members to make them aware there may be a few weeks in the coming months during which they may experience an increase in the number of students contacting them, also include the Informational Interview Guide for CCN Professionals found in Appendix B; and
- deliver course presentations as necessary.

Throughout the semester:

- deliver course presentations as necessary; and
- resolve issues with students, faculty members, and CCN professionals as necessary.

Weeks 13-15 of the semester:

- conduct wrap-up conversations with faculty members to gather feedback, particularly if it was their first semester participating in the program;
- send evaluations to professionals who were contacted through the CCN; and
- send evaluations to students who participated in the program.

Other notes:

- throughout the year pursue ongoing recruitment of individuals to join the CCN at job fairs, and through the Practice Interview Program and Alumni Center.

### **Informational Interview Program Learning Outcomes**

Student learning outcomes for the Informational Interview Program are as follows. Students will:

- Increase their ability to communicate professionally.
- Feel more confident in their ability to communicate professionally.
- Be more knowledgeable about a career field or specific profession.
- Be more aware of their own skills and interests as it relates to their career development.

Intended outcomes for professionals who participate in the Informational Interview Program are as follows. Professionals will:

- Experience an increased sense of connection to Ball State University.
- Will feel empowered to assist students in their career development.

### **Email Template to Recruit Faculty Members**

Greetings Professor \_\_\_\_\_,

I hope your semester has gone well; it is hard to believe we are already moving into the last few weeks of the semester. I wanted to reach out to you as the Career Center is preparing for the Informational Interview Program next semester, and we would like to invite your \_\_\_\_\_ course to be a part of the career infusion program next semester.

The focus of the program is to give students the opportunity to explore career paths, improve their professional communication skills, and build their professional network by conducting informational interviews with a Ball State Alumnus. An informational interview is a career intervention where a student can explore career paths by having a conversation with a working professional. The Career Center has developed an online database to connect students to alumni, and can also visit your class if desired to introduce the concept of informational interviews and their value.

If you are interested in having your students participate or have further questions about the program, please email \_\_\_\_\_.

Thank you,

\_\_\_\_\_

## Syllabus Insert

An Informational Interview is a meeting where a job seeker has the opportunity to learn from a professional about an industry or company in that they are considering for a career. These interviews give you, as the interviewer, inside information about what it is like to work in a field you find interesting. Not only will you be able to explore career options, but informational interviews can also help you develop communication skills and build your professional network. Ball State University Career Center has partnered with hundreds of alumni in a variety of fields to create a network of individuals who wish to connect with Ball State students. These alumni work across many career fields, and graduated from Ball State with degrees in a wide variety of disciplines. They wish to engage with students, and are expecting students to connect with them regarding career exploration, professional development, and the job search process.

### **To find a professional to interview:**

1. Visit [www.bsu.edu/careers/careerlink](http://www.bsu.edu/careers/careerlink).
2. Select "Current Student Login."
3. Enter your Ball State username and password.
4. In the red navigation bar, select "Networking." If this is your first time logging in to Cardinal Career Link, you may need to complete the required fields that are marked with a red asterisk.
5. Using the search function, type in your major or a career field in which you are interested. You may also search by an individual's name or email, or a specific company.
6. After finding a professional whom you would like to interview, click "Interested". At this point, a text box will appear, and you should draft a professional message to the

individual. If you would like to see an example of what your message should entail, please see the example below.

7. A notification will be sent to the professional, and they will reach out to you via email. From there, the two of you can decide whether you are able to meet in person, over the phone or video call, or via email.
8. If you are unable to find a professional in the Cardinal Career Network whom you would like to interview, you may use a website called Candid Careers which is an online resource for career exploration. Communicate with your professor if you would like to explore this option and he or she will give you instructions regarding how to access Candid Career.

### **Professionalism**

Remember that these professionals volunteer their time to work with Ball State students. Please be professional and prompt in your contact with them. See below for additional information on how to conduct Informational Interviews and specific questions to ask.

### **Example Outreach Message**

Dear Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am currently a \_\_\_\_\_ at Ball State University majoring in \_\_\_\_\_. I would like to learn more about a career as a \_\_\_\_\_, and would appreciate the opportunity to conduct an informational interview with you for 20-30 minutes to help guide my academic major and career decisions. I am generally available during the following times:

- Monday, 12:00 pm-3:00 pm
- Tuesday, 9:00 am-12:00 pm
- Thursday, 2:00 pm-5:00 pm

Please let me know if any of those times work with your schedule. Thank you for your consideration, and any guidance you may provide would be most appreciated.

Sincerely,

---

### **Potential Questions to Ask**

Please note these are sample questions. You do not need to ask all of these questions, and it is encouraged that you develop three-four of your own questions to ask during the interview.

- On a typical day in this position, what do you do?
- How did you get into this field?
- What part of this job do you find most satisfying? What part of this job do you find most challenging?
- What special advice would you give a person entering this field?
- What professional organizations do you belong to?
- What trends do you see influencing the profession?
- What next steps might you suggest for me?
- Is there an individual that you would suggest I should continue this conversation with? If so, who might that be? When I call him/her, may I refer to you?

### Sample Assignment

After completing an informational interview with a working professional, students should complete a reflective essay addressing the following:

- Name and title of interviewee.
- Date and time of the interview.
- Brief overview of the interviewee's background and career path.
- Any advice the interviewee gave you as you prepare to enter the workforce.
- After the interview, are you still interested in this career path? Why or why not?
- What is something new you learned about yourself and your career goals through this process?

Essays should be typed in Times New Roman, 12-point font, double-spaced, have one inch margins, and be between 1-2 pages in length. Due date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Script for Supplemental Instructional Video

1. Informational Interviews – what are they and why are they important?
  - a. They are a way to gather information on an occupation or field you are interested in from a professional who is in that role
  - b. Informational interviews are a way to get real-world knowledge, and to know what it would really be like to be in that career or industry
  - c. They are also a way to explore multiple career paths, to see what you may be interested in or where your skills would work best
  - d. These interviews can also help expand your professional network
2. This video is going to show you how to access and navigate the Cardinal Career Network to find a professional whom you can interview
3. The first step is to log in to your account on Cardinal Career Link. Go to:  
[www.bsu.edu/careers](http://www.bsu.edu/careers)
4. Click on Cardinal Career Link on the right hand side, current student
5. Log in using your Ball State University user name and password
6. Once on the Cardinal Career Link home page, click on the red tab at the top that says “Networking”
7. The Cardinal Career Network contains professionals, mostly alumni of Ball State, who want to connect with Ball State students. In the search bar, you can search the network by name, title, major, or company.
  - a. Let’s say you are majoring in marketing, and would like to see potential career paths you could pursue

- b. When you come across an individual you are interested in interviewing, click on their name to review their profile to learn more information about them.
  - c. After reviewing their profile, if you would like to connect with them, click on the “Interested” button at the bottom of the screen.
  - d. At this point, a box will appear that will let you generate a personal message to the professional. Please remember to be professional in your communication.  
  
Here is a good way to structure a professional email (show PowerPoint slide with example outreach message)
8. A notification containing your name and Ball State email address will be sent to the professional. They will contact you via email to set up a time to talk further.
  9. Remember that it is important to start this process well before your assignment is due as it may take several days for a professional to respond, and could take more than a week for the two of you to find a time to talk via phone or in person.
  10. If you are unable to find someone you would like to interview on the Cardinal Career Network, please contact your professor about other options for completing the assignment.

### Evaluation for Students

1. I was able to gain practical knowledge and information about the career field or occupation of my interviewee due to the informational interview.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

2. The informational interview helped me better understand my own skills and interests as they relate to my future career.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

3. The completion of the informational interview increased my ability to communicate in the professional world.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

4. The informational interview made me feel more confident in my ability to communicate in the professional world.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

5. I used the Cardinal Career Network to find a professional to interview.

Yes      No

If not, what avenue did you use to find a professional to interview?

---

6. Overall, I found this assignment to be helpful for my professional development.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

7. Please list one thing you learned through this assignment:

---

**Evaluation for Cardinal Career Network Professionals**

1. The student(s) with whom I interacted were professional.  
Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree
2. I enjoyed my interaction and communication with the student(s).  
Strongly agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree
3. I am interested in receiving information regarding additional opportunities to get involved at the Ball State University Career Center.  
Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree
4. I found the Cardinal Career Network platform easy to navigate.  
Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree
5. Please list additional suggestions or comments below.

---

### **Instructions for Candid Career, an Alternative to CCN**

Professors should note that Candid Career should only be used as an alternative for students who are unable to find a professional to interview on the Cardinal Career Network (CCN). Each video on Candid Career is two-four minutes long.

1. Go to [www.bsu.edu/careers](http://www.bsu.edu/careers). On the right side of the page there is a tab titled “Cardinal Career Link.”
2. Log into Cardinal Career Link using your Ball State username and password.
3. On the right hand of the Cardinal Career Link home page, beneath “Get Resources” there is a link titled “Candid Career.”
4. Click on the link and it will take you to the Candid Career home page where you can search by occupation or major to find videos of occupations of interest to you. The “Career Profiles” tab will take you to the entire library of videos.

## REFERENCES

- Appalachian State University. (2015). Career exploration office. Retrieved from <https://careereexploration.appstate.edu/pagesmith/159>
- Bolles, R. (2016). *What color is your parachute?* Berkeley, California: Ten Speed Press.
- California State University, Northridge. (2016). Career center. Retrieved from <http://www.csun.edu/career/sample-career-assignments>
- Contomanolis, E., Cruzvergara, C., Dey, F., & Steinfeld, T. (2015). The future of career services is now. *NACE Journal*, 76, 25-28. Retrieved from <http://www.naceweb.org/j112015/future-of-career-services.aspx?terms=the%20OR%20future%20OR%20of%20OR%20career%20OR%20services%20OR%20is%20OR%20now>
- Crosby, O. (2002). Informational interviewing. *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*, 46(2), 32-37. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2002/summer/art03.pdf>
- Dey, F., & Cruzvergara, C. Y. (2014). Evolution of career services in higher education. *New Directions for Student Services*, 148, 5-18. doi:10.1002/ss.20105
- Folsom, B., Reardon, R., & Lee, D. (2005). *The effects of college career courses on learner outputs and outcomes* (Technical report No. 26 revised). Tallahassee, Florida: The Center for the Study of Technology in Counseling and Career Development.
- Fouad, N., Guillen, A., Harris-Hodge, E., Henry, C., Novakovic, A., Terry, S., & Kantamneni, N. (2006). Need, awareness, and use of career services for college students. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 14, 407-420. doi:10.1177/1069072706288928
- Freeman, E. (2012). The design and implementation of a career orientation course for undergraduate majors. *College Teaching*, 60, 154-163. doi:10.1080/87567555.2012.669424
- Garis, J. (2014). Value-added career services: Creating college/university-wide systems. *New Directions for Student Services*, 148, 19-34. doi:10.1002/ss.20106
- Goldstein, M. (1977). *The current state of career education at the post-secondary level*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Halasz, T. J., & Kempton, C. B. (2000). Career planning courses and workshops. In D. A. Luzzo (Ed.), *Career counseling of college students: An empirical guide to strategies that work* (pp. 157-170). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Hansen, K., Oliphant, G. C., Oliphant, B. J., & Hansen, R. S. (2009). Best practices in preparing students for mock interviews. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 72, 318-327. doi:10.1177/1080569909336951

- Hartz, C. V., & Parker, J. (2012). Overview of curricular approaches. *New Directions for Student Services, 138*, 59-73. doi:10.1002/ss.20006
- Kaplan, D., & Brown, D. (1987). The role of anxiety in career indecisiveness. *The Career Development Quarterly, 36*, 149-162. doi:10.1002/j.2161-0045.1987.tb00786.x
- Kramer, G., Grites, T., White, E., Haynes, M., Gordon, V., McCauley, M., Habley, W., & King, M. (2007). Putting students first in the campus community. In Kramer, G. & Associates (Eds.), *Fostering student success in the campus community* (pp. 407-432). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Lairo, M., & Penttinen, L. (2006). Students' career concerns: challenges facing guidance providers in higher education. *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Guidance, 6*, 143-157. doi:10.1007/s10775-006-9107-z
- Lapan, R. T. (2004). *Career development across the K—16 years: Bridging the present to satisfying and successful futures*. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Lapan, R. & Turner, S. (2013). Promotion of career awareness, development, and school success in children and adolescents. In S. Brown & R. Lent, (Eds.), *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work* (pp. 539-564). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Lucas, E. (1986). College career planning and placement centers: Finding their identity. *Journal of Career Development, 13*, 9-17. doi:10.1007/BF01352174
- Macera, M. H., & Cohen, S. H. (2006). Psychology as a profession: An effective career exploration and orientation course for undergraduate psychology majors. *Career Development Quarterly, 54*, 367-371. doi:10.1002/j.2161-0045.2006.tb00201
- McClellan, G., Stringer, J., & Associates. (2009). *The handbook of student affairs administration*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Niles, S., & Hutchison, B. (2009). Theories of career development to inform advising. In K.F. Hughey, D. B. Nelson, J. K. Damminger, & B. McCalla-Wriggins (Eds.), *The handbook of career advising* (pp. 68-96). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Orr, C., Sherony, B., & Steinhaus, C. (2011). Employer perceptions of student informational interviewing skills and behaviors. *American Journal of Business Education, 4*, 23-32. Retrieved from <http://cluteinstitute.com/ojs/index.php/AJBE/article/download/6615/6691>
- Pope, M. (2000). A brief history of career counseling in the United States. *Career Development Quarterly, 48*, 194-211. doi:10.1002/j.2161-0045.2000.tb00286

- Ratcliffe, S. (2015). Building relevancy and influence: A game changer for career services. *NACE Journal*, 75, 23-29. Retrieved from <http://www.naceweb.org/j042015/build-career-services-relevancy-andinfluence.aspx?terms=Building%20OR%20relevancy%20OR%20and%20OR%20influence%3a%20OR%20A%20OR%20game%20OR%20changer%20OR%20for%20OR%20career%20OR%20services>.
- Rettenew, J. G. (2011). *The impact of informational interviewing on occupational engagement and career development of college freshmen* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas.
- Ryan, C. W., & Drummond, R. J. (1981). University based career education: A model for infusion. *Personnel & Guidance Journal*, 60, 89-92. doi:10.1002/j.2164-4918.1981.tb00648
- Super, D. (1963). *Career development: Self-concept theory*. New York: College Entrance Examination Board.
- Super, D. (1980). A life-span, life-space approach to career development. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 16, 282-298. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com.proxy.bsu.edu/science/article/pii/0001879180900561>
- Super, D. E., & Hall, D. T. (1978). Career development: Exploration and planning. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 29, 333-372. Retrieved from <http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev.ps.29.020178.002001>
- Tang, M. (2003). Career counseling in the future: Constructing, collaborating, advocating. *Career Development Quarterly*, 52, 61-69. doi:10.1002/j.2161-0045.2003.tb00628
- Turner, S. L., & Conkel, J. L. (2010). Evaluation of a career development skills intervention with adolescents living in an inner city. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 88, 457-465. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.bsu.edu/docview/750619798?accountid=8483>
- Turner, S. L., Trotter, M. J., Lapan, R. T., Czajka, K. A., Pahoua, Y., & Brissett, A. A. (2006). Vocational skills and outcomes among Native American adolescents: A test of the integrative contextual model of career development. *Career Development Quarterly*, 54, 216-226. doi:10.1002/j.2161-0045.2006.tb00153.x

APPENDIX A

POWERPOINT FOR CLASS PRESENTATIONS



# INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING



What is an Informational Interview?



## **Why conduct an Informational Interview?**

- To explore careers and clarify career goals
- To discover employment opportunities not advertised
- To expand your professional network
- To build confidence for your job interviews
- To access the most up-to-date career information
- To identify your professional strengths and weaknesses

## **Preparing for the Informational Interview**

- Identify the occupation, industry, or the organization you wish to learn about
- Assess your own interests, abilities, values, and skills when deciding the best fields to explore
- Decide what information you would like to obtain about the occupation and organization
- Research the field or career path prior to the interview
- Prepare a list of questions that you would like to have answered

## Identify People to Interview

### Cardinal Career Network



## Sample Outreach Message

Dear Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am currently a \_\_\_\_\_ at Ball State University majoring in \_\_\_\_\_. I would like to learn more about a career as a \_\_\_\_\_, and would appreciate the opportunity to conduct an informational interview with you for 20-30 minutes with you to help guide my academic major and career decisions. I am generally available during the following times:

- Monday, 12:00 pm-3:00 pm
- Tuesday, 9:00 am-12:00 pm
- Thursday, 2:00 pm-5:00 pm

Please let me know if any of those times work with your schedule.

Thank you for your consideration, and any guidance you may provide would be most appreciated.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

## Arranging the Interview

- Be concise but clear about your motivation for reaching out
- If you do not hear back from your contact, send a reminder before moving on to a different contact
- Schedule a date and time for the interview and exchange contact information in case there is a need to cancel or reschedule
- Be as flexible as possible when scheduling your interview with a professional in the field



*Phone  
Email  
Video*

## Conduct the Interview

- Confirm your interview a day or two before
- If meeting in person:
  - Review directions
  - Dress appropriately
  - Arrive on time
- If interviewing over the phone:
  - Confirm who will be initiating the phone call
  - Conduct the interview in a quiet environment
- If meeting over lunch or coffee be prepared to pay
- Be prepared to initiate the conversation
- Stay on track but also allow for spontaneous discussion
- Unless indicated by the professional, never go beyond the amount of time requested

## Sample Questions

- On a typical day in this position, what do you do?
- How did you get into this field?
- What part of this job do you find most satisfying?
- What part of this job do you find most challenging?
- What special advice would give a person entering this field?
- What professional organizations do you belong to?
- What trends do you see influencing the profession?
- What next steps might you suggest for me?
- Is there an individual that you would suggest I should continue this conversation with? If so, who might that be? When I call him/her, may I refer to you?

## After the Interview

Dear Mr. Burke:

Our meeting yesterday was extremely informative and useful in helping me navigate my own career exploration within the non-profit industry. Your experience and knowledge of this field is most impressive and I learned a great deal about possible career paths through our conversation.

I want to thank you again for taking the time from your busy schedule to meet with me. Your insights into the field were truly helpful and I am now revising my resume in light of your thoughtful advice regarding how I can strengthen my resume. I will also be looking into the professional organizations that you recommended during our meeting.

I very much appreciate having had the opportunity to meet with you. Your time and guidance was invaluable.

Sincerely,  
Sarah Johnson

APPENDIX B

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CCN PROFESSIONALS

## INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS : PROFESSIONALS

Thank you for volunteering to participate in the Ball State Professional Network! With your help, students are able to sharpen valuable professional skills, explore career paths, and make connections.

While some students are taking self-initiative to reach out to you, others are participating in the Informational Interviewing Program, and are connecting with you to complete a course assignment.

Below are some tips and information for you as you interact with students.

- When a student is interested in connecting with you, you will receive an email from the Career Center that provides you with the student's name and email address. This email may contain a personal message from the student. At this point, you will reach out to the student.
- If students are completing an Informational Interview as part of an assignment, they will request a time to talk via phone, video chat, or in person if possible. Below are some of the questions you can expect to be asked:
  - How did you get into this field?
  - What part of this job do you find most satisfying? Most challenging?
  - What advice would give a student interested in this field?
  - What does a typical day look like?
  - What professional organizations do you belong to?
  - What are the most important personal characteristics for success in the field?
  - Is professional development an important part of your career?
  - What training can I expect in this field?
  - What industry trends do you see influencing the profession?
  - What are the best sources for learning more about the industry?
  - What next steps might you suggest for me?
  - Who do you know that I should talk to next? When I call him/her, may I use your name?
- Students who connect with you may be any age and studying any discipline. This could be the first time younger students are interacting with a professional in a field in which they are interested. They may be coached on professionalism, but please be patient as others may still be learning appropriate professional communication.

Thank you again for contributing to the development of Ball State University students. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact [careercenter@bsu.edu](mailto:careercenter@bsu.edu).