



Washington University School of Law
CAREER CENTER

*Informational
Meetings*

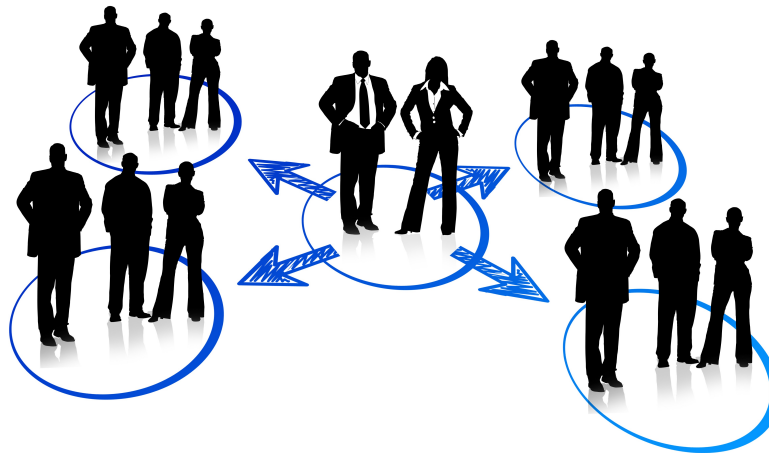




Informational meetings are an important first step towards your goal of creating mutually beneficial, professional relationships with other attorneys, as well as a great way to obtain information about a legal market or practice area and to establish contacts in the geographic area where you intend to practice.

Informational meetings are not job interviews; do not ask the person directly for a position with her/his/their employer, although you can make it clear that you are interested in working there. Most people are naturally inclined to want to help when asked, but you need to ask for something they are able to provide. In general, attorneys cannot offer you a job on the spot and might feel uncomfortable at not being able to provide that level of assistance. They can, however, provide you with ample information about the legal market in their geographic location, information about their particular practice area, and the names of potential employers and other potential contacts to whom you can reach out. Ideally, you would like to leave the meeting with a firm contact (*i.e.*, the person with whom you met) and the names of several other attorneys or employers to contact who might be of interest in your job search.

Think of an informational meeting as research, and alumni and contacts as your research sources. It is much easier to overcome the fear of contacting strangers when you are seeking information and advice than when you are clearly seeking a job. Most law students do not know precisely what they want to do with their law degree when starting law school. Research is how you start to narrow your options and to identify opportunities in your target cities.



You will need to do some self-assessment to determine your target cities and your desired practice area(s), as well as to determine what your goals are with respect to your informational meetings. You may want to gain knowledge about a particular practice area or type of employer, or you may want to talk with your contacts to help identify and land a position in your target city. Early in your law school career, you may not have narrowed down target practice areas, and a broad approach to informational meetings may help you to discern your area(s) of interest. Remember, the legal community is small. Even if a potential contact does not practice in your target geographic or practice area, an informational meeting will still be valuable, as s/he will likely be able to share his contacts in your preferred areas.

After you determine the goals for your informational meetings, begin to identify individuals you can contact. Research employers of interest and identify attorneys within the organization that you might contact. Look for any connection you have in common, including law school or undergrad alumni, common home town, social or academic fraternity, etc. You can ask friends, family, former employers, professors, or anyone you have already established in your network for a referral. Request introductions to WashULaw alumni through the Career Center.

Alumni from WashULaw or your undergraduate institution can be a tremendous, yet oftentimes overlooked, resource in your job search. Alumni can provide invaluable information about a geographic area, a particular practice area, or the legal profession in general through an informational meeting. You can search for alumni using the following resources:

Bloomberg Law Database: www.bloomberglaw.com/home - offers profiles of successful people in the corporate and legal worlds. Access these profiles through People Search on the Search & Browse menu, using available fields to narrow the search to make connections.

LinkedIn Database: Create/update your profile at www.linkedin.com and begin searching for alumni from WashULaw and your undergraduate school who are working/practicing in

your target areas. LinkedIn even provides the ability to join interest groups and alumni groups within the platform. In addition to educational alumni, LinkedIn will also show connections to alumni from any prior job affiliations that you entered on your profile. LinkedIn provides an easy way to reach out to these alumni.

Martindale-Hubbell: Another great way to search for WashULaw alumni or alumni from your undergraduate school is to use the Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory - www.martindale.com.

WashU Alumni Directory: The WashU Alumni Directory is an opt-in directory for all WashU alumni (not limited to the law school). This directory is a great resource for identifying contact information of attorneys working outside of law firms. Access the directory here - <https://alumni.wustl.edu/resources/>.

Law Firm Website: Law firm websites can be a helpful tool for identifying WashULaw alumni or alumni from your undergraduate school. Most large firms have a search function that allows you to filter by school.



The method by which you contact each individual will depend on your relationship to the contact and that person's position. Use your judgment. In most cases, you will reach out by written communication. You may choose to contact individuals through a professional email (followed by a phone call 5-7 days later) or through a phone call. Remember, your contacts are likely very busy. When reaching out for an informational meeting, it is good practice to indicate in your outreach that you are only requesting 10-15 minutes of the contact's time.

Reaching Out by Written Communication:

If you choose to contact the individual by email, you should briefly introduce yourself, and state why you are interested in the particular location or practice area. Reference what it is you want to know, as well as why you think this contact would be a good person to meet. Be sure to let the person know about any connections you may have to her/him/them. Conclude your email by thanking the contact for her/his/their time and suggesting a time to meet or talk by phone. Include that you plan to follow up on your email with a phone call in about a week. You can find sample emails on page 11 of this guide. Your outreach should always be professional and formal, even if you are reaching out by email.

Start your written communication by stating who you are, what you want, and why you are contacting this person.

Lead with any personal connection you have with the person. Otherwise, show your connection to the practice area or geographic area. Then, indicate what you want; remember, you are requesting an informational meeting. Examples include:

“John Richards recommended I contact you. I am interested in speaking with you about public interest opportunities in Memphis.”

“I was researching law firms in Chicago, and I discovered that you practice labor and employment law. I am interested in practicing employment litigation in Chicago after I graduate and would love to speak with you about your practice.”

[To an alum] “I am a law student at Washington University and am interested in practicing in Portland. I would like to know more about the practice of a corporate transactional lawyer.”

Next, indicate what you have to offer.

Highlight what you have to offer a potential employer; this will be very similar to the middle paragraph of a traditional cover letter, but abbreviated.

“I graduated with honors from Memphis State, and I have done well in law school. My law school grades put me near the top third of my class, and I have excelled in my legal writing classes.”

“I did well at Washington University for both my undergraduate and law school studies. I am particularly proud of my achievements because I worked 30 hours per week while I was in college.”

Wrap up by thanking the person for her/his/their time and suggesting next steps.

Keep the ball in your court for follow-up. Remember, you are the one asking the contact for a favor. Do not expect her/him/them to contact you.

“I will give you a call the week of March 3rd to see if we can set up a time to talk about the practice of labor and employment law in Chicago. If you would like, feel free to call me at the number above. I know you are busy, so I will not take more than 10 minutes of your time. Thank you in advance for your assistance.”

“I will be in town over my winter break from December 10th through January 5th. I will follow up with you in early December to see if we can schedule a time to meet or speak briefly by phone. Thank you in advance for your time; I understand that you are busy.”

Remember to follow up.

Follow up on your email by calling your contact within the timeframe you specified. Begin by stating who you are and what you are seeking, letting the contact know that you are following up on an earlier email. (e.g., “Ms. Jones, I am a second-year law student at Washington University, and I plan to relocate to Portland following graduation. I am following up on my email sent last week. I am contacting you as an alumna of our school in the hope that you could share your expertise on the Portland legal market with respect to a corporate transactional practice.”). Set up a time when you can meet with the contact (in person, by phone or by video conference), but be ready to have your informational meeting when you call in case the individual states this is a good time to talk.

Reaching Out by Phone:

If you decide your first contact with the person you identified should be a direct phone call, have your intro script ready. “Mr. Anders, this is Amy Taylor. I am a first-year law student at Washington University. I am interested in working at a government agency in Washington, D.C. for my 1L summer. I know you're very busy, and if this is not a good time I apologize, but I wanted to see if you might have time to meet with me for 10 minutes to talk about your career at the Department of Housing and

Urban Development and what I should be doing to prepare myself to be a marketable candidate for federal government positions in D.C.” Have a written outline of questions in case the contact indicates that she/he/they would like to talk on the phone at that time. Be able to contract or expand the conversation based on how much time the person seems to have.

Initial Contact and Conversation Tips:

Avoid Voicemail: Try not to leave a voicemail message if you reach out by phone or when you follow up. Avoid calling several times in a row because the contact is likely to have caller ID. If you must leave a message, leave it with voicemail rather than the administrative assistant the first time.

Control the Follow Up: Keep the ball in your court so that your contact understands that she/he/they can call you, but that you will reach out again. Say something like, "Mr. Jones, this is Jeff Taylor. I am a first-year law student at Washington University. I wrote you about a week ago and wanted to talk to you about the Pittsburgh legal market. I will call you again next week, but feel free to call me at 555-555-5555. Thanks for your time; I realize how busy you are."

Avoid Being Overly Aggressive: Always thank the contact, and do not hound her/him/them. Keep good records. For instance, if the contact says she will be in trial for two weeks, calendar it and contact her after that time. Never drop by a place of work uninvited or unannounced. Not everyone that you contact will respond, but some will. If you have not received a response after the second outreach, move on to your next contact.

Consider Convenience: If you are meeting a contact in person, be considerate of the contact's time and offer locations close to his/her/their office or home. Consider suggesting that you will meet the contact at his/her/their office to avoid wasting time on transit.

Keep Current Events in Mind: Be cognizant of the current public health situation when reaching out. Offer to meet by video conference or phone. If you are comfortable, you may also offer to meet in person, but be sure to offer other alternatives as well.



Before the meeting, do your homework:

You should be prepared for your informational meeting before you even make contact with the individuals in your target group. Preparing for the meeting includes researching your contact, including her/his/their practice area, type of practice, and employer. Be sure to prepare specific questions to ask and materials to review (including, perhaps, a list of local employers of interest – your contact may be able to share insight into the employers or even recommend attorneys at an employer who you can contact). Try to ask open ended questions to facilitate an ease of conversation. Example questions are provided on pages 13 through 15 of this guide.

During the Meeting – Tips for Success:

Be Professional: Whether the meeting is in person, by phone or through video conference, be on time. Wear business attire – a suit, dress and jacket, or professional separates – if you are meeting in person or by video conference. If you are meeting in person, bring a folder or leather portfolio with extra resumes, references, transcript copies and writing sample. Have a pad of paper and a pen. It *is* appropriate to take notes in an informational meeting. Smile, make eye contact and mind your manners. If applicable, pick up the check without hesitation.

Introduce Yourself: Start the meeting off by thanking the individual for meeting you, introducing yourself, letting the contact know why you requested the meeting, and giving a concise, professional summary of your background and interests. Remember: *you are running the meeting*. Now is the time to give your brief professional pitch, but do not spend the entire meeting talking about yourself and your job search. You are there to absorb advice and insights, not to spend the entire meeting talking about yourself.

Ask Questions: Throughout the meeting, make sure you have specific questions for the individual. Do not ask anything you can find out online (e.g., “does your firm have an employment practice group?). You want to avoid the contact thinking (or saying!) “Let me Google that for you...” Your goal is to learn more about the market in that geographic area, the practice area, and the day-to-day work of attorneys within the organization. It is acceptable to indicate that you would be interested in working at the individual’s organization (if applicable), but *do not* ask for a job:

“Of course, I would be very interested in any positions that would be available at the Jones firm. But, in addition, I would really appreciate your advice on...”

See the example questions provided on pages 13 through 15 of this guide.

Consider having your contact help with your professional pitch or your materials:

“Would you mind reviewing my resume? This is how I am presenting myself in interviews and I would appreciate your thoughts.”

This approach prompts the contact to review your credentials and provide suggestions.

You should also request recommendations as to next steps as you explore the practice area or city, including new leads to contact. Bring and refer to a list of attorneys or law firms in the area to help the contact be specific about suggestions:

“These are the firms I found in my research that seem to have large employment practices. Can you think of others I should include?”

“Do you know of anyone specific I should contact?”

If you are provided with new leads to contact, ask if you may use her/his/their name when you contact these next leads.

Respect the Time Limit: When you reach the time limit set in your request for the meeting, point out that you promised to take 10 minutes and the 10 minutes is up. If you are not finished, ask if she/he/they might have a few more minutes.

Be Grateful: Thank your contact for her/his/their time. You will follow up your meeting with a thank you note or email (see samples on pages 12 of this guide).



Always send a thank you note.

Sending a thank you note shows your appreciation for the attorney's time and advice. These contacts are doing you a favor by meeting with you, and you should thank the contact accordingly. Use your own judgment regarding an emailed vs. mailed thank you. Some attorneys feel that email shows much less effort and sincerity on the part of the sender, so for informational meetings in particular, you might want to consider the personal touch of a handwritten thank you note. Make sure that you use very nice note cards and that your handwriting is not only legible, but quite good. If your handwriting is not excellent, use a typed, business letter format instead. Whether you mail or email your note, remember that the thank you note is a piece of professional business correspondence. All thank you notes must be absolutely perfect – no spelling or grammar errors. You do not want to harm the great impression you made in person with a poorly written thank you letter. See page 12 of this guide for sample thank you notes.

Create a long-term relationship.

Keep organized notes tracking who you meet, what you discussed, and any follow-up (*i.e.*, when you sent the thank you note, additional contact names provided, information about when to follow up with the initial contact). This will help keep you organized and will be helpful throughout your career as you build your network.

Make sure you follow up on all the information provided by the people you meet. Contact the leads they give you and report back to the initial contact about the results (*e.g.*, "Thank you for suggesting the Missouri Commission on Human Rights. I did not know about it until you mentioned it. I checked and they do hire summer interns. I will let you know how that turns out. I will also follow up with your suggestion to contact Jane Brown at Brown and Green.").

Consider additional touchback opportunities.

Again, the goal of networking is to establish a long term connection. Think about ways that you can keep in touch with your contacts:

When you secure employment, let your contacts know.

If there will be a speaker on campus that you think would interest your contact, send her/him/them a brief email letting her/him/them know about the speaker. For example:

“I hope you are doing well. Doug Smith, the director of the Missouri Insurance Commission will be on campus Thursday, January 15th, to discuss recent changes to the regulations regarding the Missouri health insurance pool. I thought this might be of interest to you, in light of the litigation we discussed during our meeting last month. Thank you again for taking time to speak with me.”

If you come across an article that you think would be of interest to your contact, send a brief email attaching the article.

A couple of months after your initial meeting, send another email and updated resume. Reference actions that you took as a result of the first meeting or conversation or point out changes in your resume. Remind the person that you are still looking and when you will be in town again. For example:

"I met with Ms. Brown. She was very helpful and suggested a couple of other people I should contact. She spoke very highly of you and asked me to pass on her best wishes."

"I received my first semester grades, and I did well. I am particularly proud of the A- I received in Legal Research and Writing."

"I'm still looking for a summer position in Pittsburgh. If you hear of anyone who is looking, please feel free to forward a copy of my resume. I would love to practice in the corporate transactional area but am not limiting myself to just that practice area. I'll be in town the first week in March for spring break. I will give you a call then to let you know how things are going."

Dear Ms. Conrad:

I am a first-year student at Washington University law school, and Mahrya Fulfer Page in the Career Center suggested I reach out to you. I am interested in commercial litigation, and I know that you have a very successful practice. Do you have 10 minutes to share your wisdom on how I can fashion a path similar to yours?

I will be in Memphis over winter break, and would be happy to stop by your office any day between December 12th and December 30th. Please let me know what is most convenient.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Best,

Ryan Smith

Dear Mr. Miller:

I am a second-year Washington University law student and am extremely interested in learning more about insurance defense litigation and the top firms for this practice in New York City. I know you have a very successful practice in this area, and I am hoping you might have 10 minutes to talk to me about your career by phone or video conference. I realize you are very busy, and I promise to be brief. Would you have time to speak next Monday, Tuesday, or Friday?

Thank you in advance.

Best,

Ellen Ko

Dear Mr. Leavey:

I hope this email finds you well. I am a third-year student at Washington University School of Law. I am hoping to begin my legal career in Hong Kong after graduation, and I am interested in learning more about opportunities for U.S. trained lawyers in the field of wealth planning. I saw on LinkedIn that you are the head of the wealth planning practice at Jones Day, and I was wondering if you might be available for a brief, ten-minute, conversation by Skype or phone. I would like to learn more about your practice and the path you took to your current position, and seek any advice you may have about how best to begin my job search in Hong Kong.

I will follow up with you in a few days to try to coordinate a time to speak next week.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Richards

Dear Ms. Conrad:

Thank you for speaking with me this afternoon. I really enjoyed hearing about your path from transactional corporate law to complex commercial litigation. Your current international trade dispute case is fascinating, and I will be sure to follow the litigation as it progresses.

On your recommendation, I reached out to Mr. Anderson and hope to speak with him soon. Thank you again for your time.

Best,

Ryan Smith

Dear Ms. Thompson:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me yesterday to discuss your immigration practice in San Diego. I found your advice very helpful.

Your organization's immigration practice is on the forefront of challenging recent changes to the immigration and asylum process. Your case against the Attorney General involving asylum claims based on domestic violence is inspiring.

On your recommendation, I have contacted Ms. Cary Barnes of the Immigrant Law Group and hope to meet with her in the near future. Thank you again for taking time out of your busy schedule to meet me.

Sincerely,

Percy Jackson

Dear Mr. Leavey:

Thank you for speaking with me via Skype on Friday. Your insight into the Hong Kong legal market was invaluable, and I greatly appreciate the comments you provided regarding my resume. Based on your recommendation, I will be submitting my application materials to Withers next week.

I look forward to meeting you in person when I am in Hong Kong next month. Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Richards

About the contact's practice area:

In what ways is this practice area evolving?

How do you see it continuing to change in the years ahead?

Is the practice growing?

Are there certain parts of the country which offer the best opportunities for this practice?

What are the most rewarding aspects of a career in this practice area?

What skills or characteristics do you feel contribute most to a lawyer's success in this practice area?

What sacrifices have you made to succeed in this practice, and do you feel it was worth it?

What kinds of 1L/2L summer opportunities lay a solid foundation for a career in this practice area?

Are there current or expected trends in this area of which I should be aware as I start developing an intentional plan to launch my practice in this field upon graduation?

Are there certain personalities that tend to experience the greatest success as lawyers in this area? If yes, what core qualities do they have?

What is the most important thing someone entering this practice should know?

What do you know now that you wish you'd known before you entered this field?

About contact's job:

Can you tell me a little bit about your practice?

What do you like best about your job?

What do you like least?

Is your day to day practice as you expected it would be when you first started?

What kinds of problems do you handle regularly?

What kinds of decisions do you make?

What are the biggest stressors in your job?

Are there busy and slow times of the year, or is the work activity fairly constant?

Is your work primarily individual or mostly in teams? If in teams, how are they organized?

Will you tell me about a recent project you worked on?

What skills or talents are most essential to being effective in your job?

Are there particular skills or personality traits that you think are needed in your practice area that might be different from other kinds of lawyering? How did you learn these skills?

If you could change anything about your professional work, what would it be?

Preparing for a career in this practice area:

What classes have proven to be most valuable to you in your work?

How did you prepare for this work?

If you were entering this career today, would you change your preparation in any way?

What professional organizations, bar association committees, or other groups would enable me to meet more practitioners and prepare myself for a career in this area?

What professional publications or resources do you turn to regularly in your field?

Are there articles, blogs or other resources you think might be helpful in learning more about this area?

About the contact's career path:

How did you get started?

What jobs and experiences have led you to your present position?

Which aspects of your background have been most helpful?

What were the keys to your career advancement?

If you could do things all over, would you choose the same path for yourself? Why?

About the culture of the contact's firm or organization:

Why did you decide to work for this firm/employer?

What do you like most about working at your firm/employer?

What does the firm/employer do to contribute to employees' professional development?

Are there people within or outside the organization that the firm/employer holds up as heroes?

Since you have been at firm/employer, how have they fostered innovation and creativity in this practice area?

Seeking general advice and referrals from your contact:

What skills are most important to your practice?

What courses should I take to prepare me for a career in this practice area?

How can I assess whether I have the skills needed for a position like yours?

What is your best advice for a student seeking to enter this practice?

What kinds of professional experience, paid or unpaid, would you encourage for those pursuing a career in this practice area?

Do you have any special warnings for students like me as a result of your experience?

What would be the best way to learn of job opportunities in this city?

What is the best way to break into this market with limited personal ties to the city?

If you were conducting a job search today, how would you go about it?

As I move forward with my job search, may I contact you again to seek your insight and expertise on a few other matters?

Can you think of anyone else that I should talk to?

Would you mind if I used your name when I contact her/him/them?