WHO TO INVITE?

You should reach out to people who are genuinely interesting to you, and with whom you share a common history or interests. Reach out to friends, family and familial connections, alumni of UChicago and of your undergraduate institution, individuals with similar academic training, and professionals in your field.

WHERE TO FIND THEM?

Using a combination of LinkedIn and the University of Chicago Alumni Directory (uchicagoalumni.org) has proven consistently successful among graduate students and postdocs. But you should also feel free to connect with professionals from conferences, workshops, etc.

WHAT ARE THEY?

- Informal conversations, typically that last 30-60 minutes, held by phone, Skype or in person
- Arranged at your request
- Common practice among job seekers
- Essential to build your network
- Great practice for “real” interviews
- Easiest way to network – especially for introverts!
- Useful for connecting with faculty too!

WHAT ARE THEY NOT?

- A job interview
- Robotic interactions with purely instrumental objectives
- Sufficient on their own for developing a relationship
- A disingenuous exchange intended to cheat a meritocratic labor market

ARE THESE CONVERSATIONS ACTUALLY USEFUL?

It’s common for students and postdocs to express skepticism about the usefulness (and about the possibility of actually enjoying) informational interviews. But they’re a real chance to:

- Make contacts at organizations
- Find solidarity among fellow graduate alumni
- Learn examples of personal success stories
- Demonstrate sincere interest in an organization
- Identify a potential career mentor
- Discover job openings before they are listed

What will we talk about?

Remember that, in an informational interview, you are the one asking most of the questions. You should show that you are genuinely interested in the person with whom you are talking; that you care about their path; that you have done research on their organization; and that you share real interests.

Where should we talk? And for how long?

It’s acceptable to ask for a conversation via Skype, phone, or in person. Remember to be respectful of the person’s time (and to treat them for coffee if it’s in person!) and set expectations for a 30 minute conversation.

Should I bring a resume or CV?

At your first conversation, it can be helpful to have a resume for reference. You should not send a resume or CV in your initial outreach to a potential informational interview unless one is specifically requested.

Is it cheating to find jobs through connections?

No. By reaching out and demonstrating that you are a thoughtful, qualified, and curious person, you are making life easier for a hiring manager. There are lots of applicants out there. When done right, your outreach will make you memorable in a good way.
RESEARCHING ALUMNI TO INTERVIEW

- Search for individuals on LinkedIn, filtering your search results by criteria like “University of Chicago” (School), New York City Area (Area), or the name of an employer (a firm where you are interested in working (see below)).
- Connect with professionals on LinkedIn. Always customize your outreach (see next page)
- If possible, use the UChicago Alumni Directory to find an email address, or use Google
- Send an initial outreach email (see below)
- After two weeks, be sure to send a follow-up

**NOTE: It is vital that you send a follow-up if there is no response to the initial email. It is very likely that you are reaching out to a busy person with a full inbox! Following up with a brief note is not too forward. Indeed, it may be necessary to get their attention.

Use LinkedIn and the Alumni Directory Smartly

CUSTOMIZING OUTREACH
Be sure to personalize requests to connect on LinkedIn. It’s a small gesture! But it gives you one more opportunity to adopt a professional, but informal voice.

USE FILTERS SMARTLY
LinkedIn makes it possible to narrow search results by a number of different filters. Start by searching for University of Chicago alumni and continue to narrow your parameters from there.

Tip: Don’t only search for individuals whose “current company” matches your precise interests. It is often useful to filter by “past company” to both (a) get the perspective of individuals who have moved onto new opportunities, (b) learn about the sequential moves that people make in their career, and (c) discover new organizations where individuals with similar backgrounds find work.

USE THE NETWORK!
When combined with LinkedIn, the UChicago Alumni Directory can be a powerful tool. While LinkedIn will give you updated professional information, the UChicago Alumni Directory will often have direct email addresses of alumni.
REACHING OUT

Sending a professionally worded, informal introduction is the first step. Follow this template! Be sure to keep your emails short and, to the best of your availability, concentrate on what makes you interested in your contact.

Make sure to identify what you have in common, UChicago or otherwise

First name is typically appropriate, but err on the side of formality for senior contacts

Don’t say too much about your work. Specificity is less important than ensuring that the contact gets an idea of who you are and what you work on. In some instances, the specific content of your work may be important to the contact, but typically a general introduction suffices.

Make sure to express genuine interest in the person’s work and/or career path and back it up with an example.

Make the request. Consider asking for an in-person meeting if the person is local. They can always suggest a phone call if it is more convenient for them.

Let them know that you will follow up. If you do not hear back after a week or so, reply to your original email with a shorter note saying that you are following up on your previous message and look forward to speaking with them.

Including your linkedin URL in email signature is a subtle way to suggest that they look at your (virtual) resume.

Dear [First Name],

I’m a current MA student in the humanities at The University of Chicago, where I’ve been concentrating on [LAYMAN’S TERMS FOR YOUR CONCENTRATION—NO MORE THAN A SENTENCE]. I’ll be finishing the degree next June and am excited to be exploring options in [NAME THE FIELD].

I’m reaching out because I came across your profile and was excited to see [SOMETHING ACTUALLY EXCITING]. I was especially interested to see that you [DID SOMETHING ACTUALLY INTERESTING].

It would be great to chat sometime over the next two weeks by phone or in person. I’d be grateful for advice you might have about making a transition into [NAME THE FIELD] after graduation. I’m happy to work around your schedule and can follow up before the end of the month if that’s easier.

Thanks so much and I look forward to talking soon!

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COMMON QUESTIONS

- Tell me about a typical day at your job / what does a typical project look like?
- What’s your favorite thing about your current role? How does it differ from graduate work?
- What do you wish you knew about this career path when you were still in graduate school?
- What kinds of skills does your organization seem to value most? Is this true elsewhere?
- Given what you know about my research so far, who else might you recommend I meet?
- Do you mind looking at my resume after this meeting? It would be great to have feedback!

FOLLOW UP

Always send a follow up email with a simple thank you and an offer to stay in touch. It’s also appropriate to send additional follow-up emails when you have updates about your academic progress or professional development to share. It’s always helpful to include a link to something that was pertinent to your conversation, or that might be interesting!