

Student Guidelines: GSAS Alumni Career Contacts Program

Welcome to the GSAS Alumni Career Contacts Program! **Please read this entire guide to help you prepare for your meeting with a GSAS graduate.**

PROGRAM RULES

The GSAS Alumni Career Contacts program provides you with access to a network of GSAS graduates who are excited to connect with master's students for a **one-time, 30-minute informational interview.**

- **Students may only schedule ONE informational interview at a time.** You must wait until you have completed your first informational interview before you schedule a second, and you must complete your second before you schedule your third.
- **Students may schedule up to three informational interviews with *different alumni*.** You may not meet with the same alum twice.

WHAT ARE INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS?

Informational interviews are **one-to-one conversations** with professionals to gather information about:

- Their career path, their current job, and any previous jobs
- A specific industry they work in or have worked in
- Employers they are familiar with
- Emerging and future trends in their field
- Skills they have developed and currently use in their job
- How to tailor your résumé, cover letter, or prepare for an interview in a specific sector or organization
- How to navigate the US job search as an international student or how to search for a role as an experienced candidate or career changer

The purpose of an informational interview is to learn about someone's professional experience as you explore career options. **The goal is NOT to ask for a job, but to seek information that can help you navigate your own career journey more effectively.**

Also, you can use the information you gather to make yourself a stronger applicant when you are ready to apply for the type of jobs you have been learning about.

To learn more about informational interviewing, watch "[How To Conduct an Informational Interview or Coffee Chat](#)" in CourseWorks.

HOW TO SET UP A MEETING WITH A CAREER CONTACT:

1. SELF-REFLECTION:

To hold a successful informational interview, you must first take time to self-reflect and consider what you hope to accomplish in your conversation with a GSAS graduate. Also, self-reflection should include a review of your past experiences and an assessment of your skills, interests, and work values. Ask yourself the questions below to get started. If you need help with answering any of these questions, review relevant materials in the [GSAS Compass Resource Library](#).

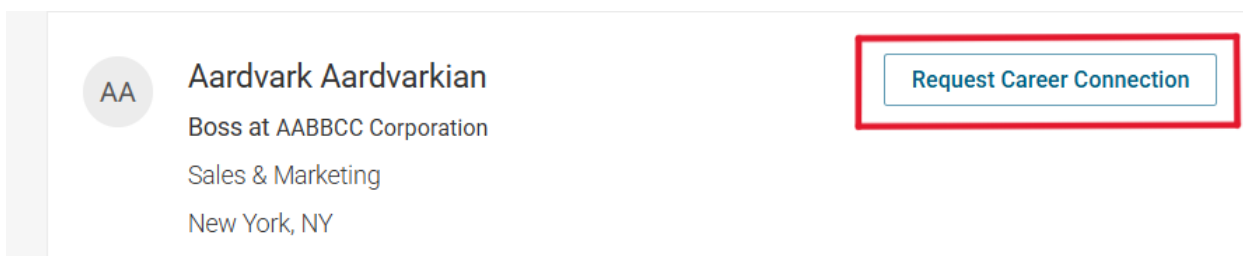
- What are my skills, interests, and work values?
- What career paths am I most interested in learning more about?
- What are my career goals for after graduation?
- How can the Career Contact help me work toward my career goals?
- What problem(s) might be an obstacle in reaching my goals?

2. SELECT WHICH ALUMNI TO CONTACT:

Review the [Alumni Career Contacts database in the GSAS Compass portal](#). The landing page includes each contact's name, job title, employer, GSAS department from which they graduated, and their career field. You can scroll through all of the alumni or use the search filters to narrow your search. If you click on the alum's name, you will see a more complete profile that includes their graduation year, further information about their current role, and the topics they are able to discuss. Also, you might want to search for the person's LinkedIn profile to learn more about their career path.

Read each alumni profile and consider if their career field, employer, and topics they are able to discuss align with your goals for the conversation. Keep in mind that even someone who studied something different from you or works in an industry that you had not considered might still be helpful in your career exploration. **NOTE: You may only express interest in one Career Contact at a time. You may only contact another alum AFTER you have completed your informational interview.**

3. REQUEST CAREER CONNECTION: Once you have decided who you would like to request a meeting with, click the "Request Career Connection" button.



AA

Aardvark Aardvarkian
Boss at AABCC Corporation
Sales & Marketing
New York, NY

Request Career Connection

After you select this button, a window will pop up with a space for you to write a brief message to the Career Contact. Think of this as the note you might add to a connection request on LinkedIn. Please use the template below—there is no character limit, but keep your message brief and make sure to maintain a professional tone.

Dear [First Name],

My name is [Full Name], and I am an MA student in [Name of Program/Department]. I am writing to request a 30-minute informational interview with you as part of the GSAS Alumni Career Contacts program. My goal(s) for the meeting is/are to [e.g. improve networking skills, find out more about your industry, get help with my job search strategy, etc.].

I look forward to connecting!

Sincerely,

[Your full name]

GSAS staff will review your connection request. Once your request is approved, you will receive an email from gsas-compass@columbia.edu with your Career Contact's email address.

4. REQUEST AN INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Once you receive the Career Contact's email address, send them a message to request an informational interview. Here is a template you can use:

Email Subject: Request for Informational Interview, Alumni Career Contacts

Dear [First Name],

I hope this finds you well. I would like to request an informational interview with you through the GSAS Alumni Career Contacts program. I am a graduate student in [insert MA program name] at Columbia University, and I am [e.g. exploring careers in XYZ, considering whether to pursue a career in ABC or apply to PhD programs, etc.]. I noticed your profile on the GSAS Alumni Career Contacts website, and I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about [e.g. your career path and experience]. [Insert one more line about your background, interests, or skills, or what you would like from the conversation.]

Would you be willing to schedule a 30-minute informational interview over the phone or via Zoom at a time that is convenient for you? Thank you for considering my request and I hope we can meet in the near future.

Best regards,

[Your full name]

5. SEND A CALENDAR INVITATION AND A RÉSUMÉ:

When you confirm a time, date, and meeting format for your meeting, **send the Career Contact a calendar invitation**, so they have all the necessary event details. If you are speaking on the phone, ask them for the best number at which to reach them. If you or the career contact prefer a video call, send them a Zoom link. You can set up a [free Zoom account](#) through Columbia.

Also, send them a copy of your résumé, so they can see your experience. Finally, notify the Career Contact **at least 24 hours in advance** if you need to change or cancel the appointment.

6. PREPARE FOR THE CONVERSATION

A) Develop your questions: During an informational interview, you are expected to lead the conversation. To prepare for your meeting, develop a list of ~10 questions to ask the Career Contact. You might not have time to ask all of your questions, so prioritize the most important ones. Watch “[How To Conduct an Informational Interview or Coffee Chat](#)” for a refresher on informational interviewing. [Click here](#) to see a list of sample questions, which also includes a list of mistakes to avoid when conducting an informational interview.

B) Prepare your short “elevator pitch,” to answer the question “tell me about yourself.” Your answer to this question will help the Career Contact understand you as a person and can help facilitate connection in a short period of time. Your self-introduction should be short (not more than two minutes) and focused. Do not talk at length about your specific research or mention things in your personal life that are irrelevant to the conversation. Instead, focus on sharing a high-level overview of you and your experience. [Click here](#) to watch the LinkedIn Learning course “Delivering an Authentic Elevator Pitch.”

HOW TO FOLLOW UP AFTER A MEETING:

1. SEND A THANK YOU NOTE

Send a short “Thank you” email within 24 hours of your meeting with the Career Contact. Also, request to connect with them on LinkedIn. Below, find a sample thank you note. The message should express your gratitude and you should also let them know how they assisted you in your career exploration.

Dear [First name],

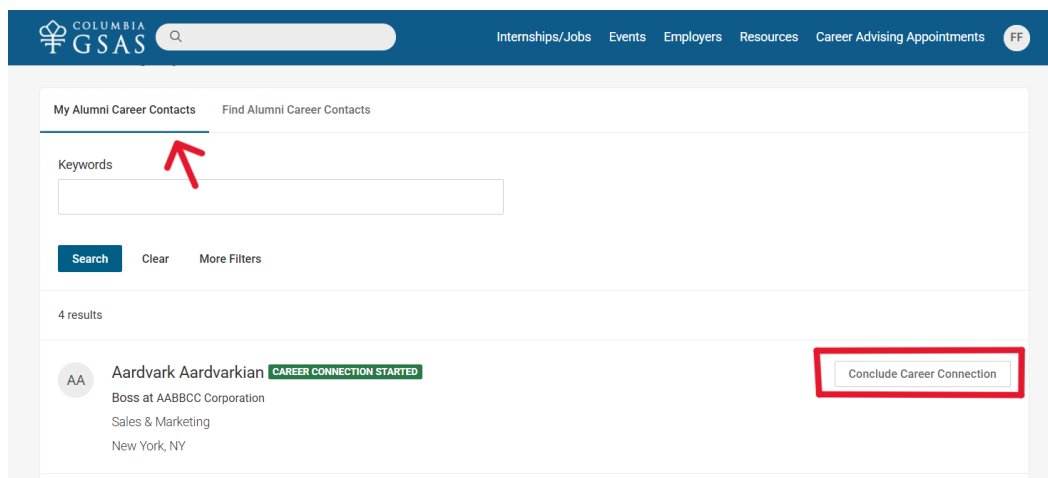
Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today. I enjoyed hearing about how you transitioned from graduate school to your role at the Red Cross and learning more about what it’s like to work at SmartStart. Thanks as well for suggesting your two friends and colleagues who would be great for me to speak with! I’ll wait to hear back from you before reaching out to them.

Our conversation has made me even more excited and optimistic about exploring career opportunities in education and data science. I look forward to staying in touch with you!

Very best,
[Your name]

2. NOTIFY GSAS COMPASS THAT YOUR MEETING IS COMPLETE

Once you have met with the Career Contact, navigate back into the [Alumni Career Contacts database](#), find the graduate you spoke with under “My Alumni Career Contacts, and **click the “Conclude Career Connection” button**. This step is very important because it will make the graduate available to meet with other students in the program and helps us keep data on program usage.



If you have questions about this step or are unable to find the button, please write to GSAS Compass, at gsas-compass@columbia.edu.

NOTE: You may only contact another alum AFTER you have completed your informational interview.

HAVE MORE QUESTIONS ABOUT NETWORKING?

Log into the GSAS Compass portal and navigate to the [Resource Library](#), where you will find an article titled “networking tips” or watch our online “networking” workshop. [Log into Canvas](#) to view this original and on-demand content.

You can find additional information in the [Career Guide for Graduate Students and Postdocs: Informational Interviews](#) developed by the Office of Career Services at the University of Pennsylvania.

If you have questions about the GSAS Alumni Career Contacts program, please email GSAS Compass, the Office of Graduate Career Development: gsas-compass@columbia.edu.