Informational Interview Guidelines
Due: March 6th. Points: 180.

One learning outcome of this course is to learn about the field of gerontology or aging, including the many sub-fields and types of occupations. This assignment is designed to assist you in your personal exploration of an occupation or sub-field and also to share in other students' explorations.

Identify a sub-field or occupation that interests you and a particular person practicing in the field. Your field might be more general, but I would like you to explore a position that focuses on aging. For example, if you are interested in biological or chemical research, find a person conducting research related to aging. Don’t pick a field you already know. Branch out and interview someone whose job you don’t know very much about. Make an appointment for a formal interview, even if this is someone you know well. The interview should focus on what their work is like on a daily basis, what kind of preparation they had for their position, and what the prospects for future work look like. If you are unable to identify a particular individual, you could alternatively conduct a systematic occupation or career search, using information from professional associations or other employment resources, but it is definitely preferable to talk to a person working in the field.

You should prepare questions to guide the interview, but be prepared to go in different directions, depending on the kind of information and response you are getting from the interviewee.

The kinds of questions you might ask include:

• What attracted you to this kind of work? What previous experience in the field of gerontology/aging did you have? Did you need particular academic or professional training for this position? What kind of preparation did you have or do you think would be useful for a person choosing this kind of work?

• What do you do in your job? Do you have a formal job description? What is your typical daily routine? What do you like most/least about your work? Was your position a pre-existing position, or did you “create” the position on the job? Does your work involve direct service with elders? Who are your work associates? How would you describe your work atmosphere and the pace of your work? In general, do you find yourself burned out or energized at the end of the workday?

• What are your relations with larger organizations and/or government agencies? Do you operate autonomously or do you have direct supervision? To whom are you accountable? Does the job involve a lot of paperwork?

• Do you see opportunity for advancement? What would be required to advance in terms of greater responsibility and/or remuneration in this job or related jobs? In general, how would you describe the prospects for this sub-field or occupation in the next 5 or 10 years?

Don't feel bound by these questions. Design your own, and innovate as the interview proceeds. People usually like to engage in a thoughtful informational interview, but do be sensitive to the time involved.

Your write-up should be about 3 pages. Include a final paragraph in which you reflect on whether or not you would like to do this person’s job. Be prepared to share your interview with others in class.