



Networking

WHAT IS NETWORKING?

Networking is an opportunity to build a web of connections with individuals throughout your life. At different points in time, certain relationships could become important to your social or professional life. Networking for professional purposes is tapping into the knowledge, information, and connections that others have to offer you as it relates to your career goals. It is also being willing to do the same for others.

Networking does not have to be scary or intimidating! It is a natural process of using your curiosity and career goals to connect with others, and almost all professionals understand its value. Moreover, most people expect it! You don't have to create a network overnight. Building your network is a lifelong process, and you will naturally be more focused on developing these relationships and reaching out to specific individuals when you're starting your career or facing a career transition.

WHY SHOULD I NETWORK?

There are many good reasons to utilize your network. Which of the following objectives makes the most sense for where you are in your career planning process?

To help in your process of career exploration. If you want to know more about a certain occupation, field of work, or organization, talking to someone who has experience can help you determine if it's a path that truly interests you.

To gather information before or during the job/internship application process. Learning about procedures or priorities from someone who works at an organization where you're applying might help strengthen your application.

To stay informed about opportunities. Many jobs or internships are never posted online, and the only way you might hear about them is through your network. Still more opportunities might be posted in places that you don't use or know about. Word of mouth is a powerful means of hearing about opportunities that others think might be a good fit for you.

To increase the chances that the employer will review or consider your application. Some employers receive hundreds of applications for one position. If you have a contact within the organization, she might be willing to inform the hiring manager or employer about your application. In many cases, this means that they will be more likely to dig through the stack and give your application a closer look. Keep in mind, however, that your contact may only be able to help so much depending on how closely she is connected to those doing the hiring, how well she knows you, and whether she truly thinks you would be a good fit for the position. Furthermore, very few people are hired simply because they were referred by someone else –you still have to have an impressive application and interview well.

WHO SHOULD I NETWORK WITH?

Who you connect with for professional networking purposes will depend on what you want or need. Once you have determined your networking objective, think about who you already know who might be able to help. You already have an existing network composed of the following categories of people:

- Family (immediate and extended)
- Friends
- Friends of your family
- Friends of friends
- Family of your friends
- Former or current supervisors or coworkers
- Teachers and mentors from high school
- Coaches
- UMass Professors

Can any of these people help you explore careers that interest you, gather information about the job application process, learn about opportunities, or improve your chances of getting your application reviewed? If so, this is where you should start!

HOW CAN I BUILD OR STRENGTHEN MY NETWORK?

If there is no one in your existing network (see above) who can help you achieve your objective(s), don't worry! There are many ways to expand your network.

UMass Alumni

Alumni can be one of your greatest resources! Many UMass alumni are happy to meet or hear from current students. You can find and learn about alumni by using LinkedIn, and also by registering for the [UMass Alumni Advisor Network](#). There, you can connect with alumni who are interested in helping you with resumes, interviewing, and having career-related conversations.

Use LinkedIn to search for alumni:

- Working in certain employment industries
- Working at certain organizations
- Living and working in certain countries, cities
- Who had specific majors (see what do for work)

Once you get the results of your search, review individual profiles and decide who might be able to help you meet your objective(s). Make a list of 5-10 alumni who you think might be helpful and refer to the Connecting with Alumni handout to learn how to reach out to them appropriately. If you are contacting alumni because you want to explore certain industries or occupations, see the Informational Interviewing handout for sample questions to ask.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a networking site for people who want to establish a professional online presence and connect with other professionals. It is NOT a social platform and should only be used for career exploration or professional networking purposes. If you do not already have a LinkedIn profile, we recommend you create one. Employers will look at your LinkedIn profile if they consider you a viable candidate. For tips on building your profile, read the Profile Checklist for Students. Next, send requests to connect to friends, family, prior or current supervisors, mentors, etc. (1st degree connections). Your network will expand naturally as you check out the people who are connected directly to these 1st degree connections (2nd degree connections) and people who are directly connected to your 2nd degree connections (3rd degree connections). The more closely connected you are to the person, the more access you typically have to the information in their profile, although it depends on how each person manages his security settings.

Once you have some connections on LinkedIn, you can use it in the following ways to network:

- Search for key words that reflect your interests (e.g. industrial psychology, aquaponics, immigration law, computer programmer, food science, etc.) or a specific company or organization

where you have applied for a job or hope to work in the future. Review the results for people whose profiles contain your keywords and look at their profiles to learn more about them. If they are a 1st degree connection, you know them personally and can contact them directly if you choose to do so. If they are a more distant connection (2nd or 3rd), LinkedIn indicates how you're connected. If you are linked through a 1st connection, perhaps s/he will be willing to make an introduction. In this case, you need to be clear about your intentions for connecting with the person.

- Join the University of Massachusetts Amherst Alumni group (students are welcome to join). If you share a group with someone, you can usually see more of their profile information even if you're not connected.

The more you build your network in LinkedIn, the more access you'll have to information and connections that might be helpful in your career planning and job/internship search.

Internships/Volunteering

As you gain experience, you also gain connections. Internships and volunteer opportunities are great ways to meet new people and expand your professional network.

Networking Events

Occasionally, you will hear about opportunities to meet and network with new people, and usually these formal networking events have a specific focus that brings people together (e.g. a law-focused event in Boston, a UMass Amherst Alumni Association event in DC or a conference on public policy). Before you go, try to determine who will be there and whether there is anyone in particular you'd like to meet or any information that you'd like to gather.

Anytime, Anywhere!

You never know when you will meet someone who could help you in your career: on an airplane, at a party, on the subway, at a restaurant, in a yoga class, etc. Although you should be intentional about growing your network, sometimes it happens in unexpected ways.

Fears & Concerns

Many students hesitate to ask for help from people in their network for a number of reasons.

- **“I'm afraid networking will be awkward. What will I say? What if I make a bad impression?”**
Prepare! Do your homework in advance to prepare what you want to ask or say. Find as much information about the person or people you are going to meet or speak to. Preparing and doing your research will help you develop good, relevant questions and determine what you want to share about yourself to make a good first impression. There may be awkward moments in your conversations but this is normal!
- **“Networking feels like I'm taking advantage of someone to meet my own needs. Isn't it seen as manipulative?”**
Networking is a lifelong process of building relationships, and we all call on people we know for help at times. Whenever possible, try to extend your network when you don't need something or when all you need is information or advice. This allows you to create more genuine relationships so you don't feel as strange contacting someone out of the blue for something that asks more of them (e.g., giving feedback on your resume before you apply for a job or recommending you to an employer). There are times, however, when you need help quickly because of time constraints. In these cases, you should be clear about the kind of help you're seeking without putting any unnecessary burden on the person. NEVER ask someone for a job or put them in a position where they might feel uncomfortable fulfilling your request.

- **“It feels phony to connect with someone just for networking purposes.”**
Use the opportunity to meet or speak with someone new to *actually* get to know them. This process of sharing experiences and getting to know each other tends to make the conversation feel more natural and genuine. Moreover, most people understand the purpose of networking and have practiced networking themselves.
- **“Why would anyone want to help me when they don’t get anything out of it?”**
Networking is *not* a one way street. The people helping you benefit too. They might experience good feelings knowing that they have been helpful, or they may really want to pay forward any help they’ve received in the past. Also, most people love to share their experiences with someone who cares. You are a captive audience who is interested in their story and advice, and this is rare!

SHOULD I FOLLOW UP AFTER NETWORKING?

Yes! You should always send a thank you email or handwritten note after you speak or meet with someone for networking purposes. You may also wish to keep in touch with certain people over the long-term, especially if you established a strong connection or think they might be a good resource in the future. In this case, share any updates or news with them that relates to your conversation(s), especially if you have accepted a position! If your career goals change, they may be able to refer you to new connections in their network. Long-term relationships are where the magic really happens – the stronger your relationship is, the more you will be able to help and support each other throughout your careers.

NETWORKING DO’S AND DON’TS

There is a bit of an art to networking and although you don’t have to be perfect, there are some important tips to keep in mind.

DO:

- Understand the importance of networking. Approximately 70%-80% of professionals obtain positions because of some form of networking. You should spend about 70% of your career planning time networking.
- Build relationships even when you don’t need anything. Continue to network after you’ve found a job.
- Respect people’s time and stick to the agreed upon time frame for a conversation.
- Prepare for conversations by researching the career field and individual in advance.
- Develop a networking strategy. Start with people who are earlier in their careers to learn more about the field, lingo, etc. before contacting people who are further along in their careers. This allows you to practice when there is less at stake.
- Come up with a system for tracking your network contacts.
- Be yourself.

DON'T

- Be afraid to ask for help – most people are flattered to be asked for advice and want to help.
- Ask for a job or beg for work.
- Contact as many people as possible and send a generic email to everyone. Select a handful of people you would like to talk to and tailor your communication so that they feel like you have selected them for a specific reason. It’s better to make a few memorable meaningful connections than many forgettable connections.
- Forget to send a thank you note to anyone you speak with!