

NETWORKING

WHY NETWORK?

Networking is one of the most powerful tools an individual can use. Students and new graduates can develop a list of contacts who can provide information on careers and suggest job search strategies. Networking opens up new opportunities and is advantageous in an extremely competitive job market. It is important to remember that there is a right and wrong way to make these connections and you should be prepared before you contact alumni.

BENEFITS OF NETWORKING

- Validate career choices
- Develop familiarity and self confidence in your career interests
- Observe people in their work setting
- Gain recognition and visibility in your field
- Learn interviewing skills without the pressure of an actual interview
- Build confidence in your ability to discuss your career interests and goals
- Find support/mentors for your job search
- Get additional leads to jobs and/or information
- Develop a greater knowledge of the field
- Gather information that can impress employers in a cover letter or job interview

We are fortunate to have dedicated alumni who are willing to give their time and expertise. Please approach alumni with professionalism so that other students may continue to benefit from this resource. Use the Career Education office as a resource for ideas on how to develop and expand your networking and create beneficial experiences.

NETWORKING ETIQUETTE

Effective networkers always respect:

Time. They are conscious about time, and never ask for too much or too little.

Offers to help. They show sincere gratitude for offers to make personal introductions, follow up promptly on referrals, and never use the contact's name for referral purposes without permission.

Confidentiality. They don't attribute information to a contact or other source without reflection on whether the disclosure will compromise the person.

The value of gratitude. They communicate appreciation at the meeting, send a thank you e-mail immediately following, inform the contact of where and how his/her counsel has been valuable, provide the contact with information that may be of interest, and speak positively of the contact's helpfulness to others.

A two way exchange. They share any information picked up along the way that may be valuable to their contacts.

Keeping contacts informed. They periodically inform their network of their progress. Contacts like to know if their advice or direction was helpful.

ONLINE NETWORKING

Sites like LinkedIn have changed the face of networking. **Having an online presence is increasingly important in today's job market.** All social media platforms – even Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which are meant more for your personal life – should be appropriate. LinkedIn is a great way to begin building a professional online image and a way to connect with Allegheny College alumni. See our LinkedIn hand-out to get started building your profile.

THE GATEWAY · CAREER EDUCATION

NETWORKING MISTAKES

Being overly aggressive: Ask for help. If there is no response, ask again. After the second time, stop asking. People may not be in a position to help you. Please be respectful.

Treating it as a one way street: Those new to networking often think only about what's in it for them. Yes, you're looking for work but someone may come along and ask you for a referral or something else and you should be willing to help them. This is a great way to further develop and maintain contacts.

Giving up: Sometimes a networking attempt doesn't go well. Networking is ongoing effort – you have to attend more than one event and contact numerous professionals. Like everything in life, the more you do it, the better you'll be at it and the more you'll get out of it in return.

NETWORKING APPROACHES

The following approaches are how you can contact individuals and ask for specific help.

Informational Interview Request: I received your contact information from Allegheny College's Career Education Office. I am researching career options and am especially interested in learning more about a career in _____. Could I talk with you to learn what you do in your position and get advice on how I might prepare for a similar career?

Expand Network Contacts: Would you provide me the names of other professionals I could talk to about similar experiences? I want to learn more about this field to make an informed decision about my future.

Request for a Shadowing Experience: I've been doing some research on the field of ____ and would like to observe a "typical day" in your position. Could I visit your office and observe your daily work activities? I can be available when it is convenient for you.

Request for Job Search Assistance: I'm looking for a job in ____ and would appreciate any help you can offer. Could you recommend the best strategy for obtaining an interview in this field/location? What procedures should I follow? Do you have any suggestions concerning how to prepare for an interview?

Follow-up: Send thank you e-mails to all of your contacts. Tell them how their information/advice helped and your next steps in career preparation. If an interview is arranged by a network contact, tell how the referral helped you.

INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING

Informational interviewing is a productive way to gather details from professionals about occupations that interest you. It is helpful to determine if your ideas about the work are realistic and if it is an appropriate match for your skills, values, and career interests.

This can be accomplished by speaking with professionals in career fields of your interest either by phone or in person. The interview is strictly to gather career information and not to ask for a job. It is appropriate to arrange an appointment for the interview to take place in person or on the phone.

In addition to Allegheny alumni, reach out to as many professionals as possible. Gather as much career related information as you need to be able to make an informed career decision.

The suggested questions below are an excellent way to prepare for this type of conversation.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

- What credentials, educational degrees, licenses, etc. are required for entry into this kind of work?
- What types of prior experiences are necessary?
- Can you suggest some ways a student could obtain this necessary experience?
- How did you prepare for this work? If you were entering this career today, how would you change your preparation in any way to facilitate entry?
- What are your typical day and work week like? How is your time occupied? How does the time use vary? Are there busy and slow times or is the work fairly constant?
- What particular skills or talents are most essential to be effective in your job? How did you learn these skills? Did you enter this position through a formal training program? How can I evaluate whether or not I have the necessary skills for a position such as yours?
- What are the major frustrations of this job?
- What are the major rewards aside from extrinsic rewards such as money, fringe benefits, travel, etc.?
- What interests you least about the job or creates the most stress?
- What is the average length of time for an employee to stay in the job you hold? Are there incentives or disincentives for staying in the same job?
- Where are you located in the organizational structure?
- What obligations does your work place on you outside of the ordinary work week?
- If your work was suddenly eliminated, what kind of work do you feel prepared to do?

Adapted in part from The Field Experience Guidebook, Section @: Getting the Most from Your Field Experience, University of Delaware, Career Planning & Placement Office.