1. WHAT IS NETWORKING?

Networking is the process of discovering and utilizing existing connections between people. This term also implies moving beyond your immediate network and tapping into other people's networks, perhaps far-removed from your own. Everyone knows other people and thus already has a network. Genuine networks often stem from friendships or business relationships.

Networking is a planned process. In formal and informal settings, you will interact with and become known to people who can provide information about the world of work, job openings, leads, personal contacts, and employers who are hiring. Networking is about talking with people and obtaining referrals so that every contact you make is based on a referral from a person you know on some level. You may feel a bit awkward asking for help this way in the beginning. It takes skill to network effectively. Networking is a must to uncover job opportunities in the "hidden" job market, which may constitute over 80% of jobs. The fact is direct one-to-one contact with people, preferably face to face, is by far the most effective way to get a job or internship.

2. HOW DO I NETWORK?

Talk about yourself and your goals and express true curiosity about others. When you share about your skills and interests, what you have done, what you would like to do and where you'd like to do it, the more likely people will begin to see links between themselves and you.

Ask questions! Most people are flattered if you ask questions about what they do and how they got there, and if you ask for their opinions and advice. People will begin to share information about their own backgrounds and who they know and where they have been.

Remember that everyone knows of other people in their own field, but also in other fields and often in other geographic locations, so often people you already know can connect you to other valuable contacts.

Plan for networking! Anticipate when you will be in a position to network and plan what you want to ask, what you want to communicate about yourself and how. For example, you might plan to take resumes to a job fair, but it would be awkward to take resumes to a social or sporting event. If you want to build your network in a particular field or area, one of the most effective strategies for doing so is informational interviewing.

3. ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING

Online social networking sites are websites that allow people to join online communities with other people by schools, places of employment, interests, geographical information, etc. These online communities allow people to interact through blogs, pictures, videos, instant messaging, or text. Because of the ability to link together with people from around the world, many college students find these sites rather appealing. You might be a member of one or more social networking sites currently. Facebook and Twitter are a few examples of the most popular networking sites available on the internet. Although many of these sites are used by millions of people, there are some pros and cons you should be aware of before joining these online communities.

Pros:
Social networking sites allow people to communicate more efficiently than ever before. Many of these sites allow its members to connect with people who share similar interests. Instead of only learning potential persons of interest in your local city or state, with the internet you can now make connections to

other countries. Networking outside of your geographical area can increase your chances of possible employment. Because 80% of jobs are obtained through networking meeting new people associated with similar career interests, majors, or student organizations can really give you an advantage!

Within many of these social networking sites are groups or other communities you can join in order to specify areas of interest as well as narrow your contacts for specific interests. For every field of work there are current issues affecting that field. Because of this, it is important to stay knowledgeable within your field. These sites can allow you to ask questions and to join discussions on hot topics. You can also utilize your new friends to find out when opportunities become available in the organization or company you are interested in working for.

Cons:
You might be asking yourself, "So, what's the big deal? All of my friends have Facebook." Remember, anyone can potentially see your information that you post. This means status updates on Twitter and tagged pictures and group affiliations on Facebook could cost you that dream job or internship. Never post anything that might damage your credibility. Every employer who might consider hiring you will more than likely search online for your name. Knowing that Google.com is a great place to start, try googling your name and see what you find. You might be shocked to see what is out there on the web about you! As a rule, if you have to question whether or not to post something, don't.

4. PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING

Professional networking sites are websites that allow people to join online communities in the same manner as social networking sites. The difference between the two is that professional sites are used primarily to understand more about your current or desired field and to stay connected with other professionals in a more specialized community. Because of the nature of professional networking, all students should begin thinking about establishing a professional network before graduating from college.

Do not wait until your last year of undergraduate study to begin seeking out professional connections.
While you might have multiple social networking accounts the most important thing to keep in mind is converting your social networking style to a more professional one. Many professionals either delete or seriously alter their existing accounts on social networking sites before entering the workforce. Keep your professional career in mind when creating social networking profiles. You can be in an internship during your second year in college and still make professional connections.

Identify your short-term and long-term professional goals and what you need to reach them.
Understand that professional networking in general is not "using" someone. This is also the case with online professional networking. A healthy online network is one where you can contribute to the professional development of others as well as your own. You want to begin by fully engaging your profile. A profile where you specify past and present employment and career interests gives others an idea of your career goals. Prior to setting up an account, have in mind where you would like to be in 2-3 years as well as where you want to be in 5-10 years. Knowing your short-term and long-term professional goals helps you to accurately seek out professionals who can help you best.

Research key information about employers or industries.
Before seeking out or engaging your contacts within a professional online community you want to be knowledgeable about your field as well as specific employers of interest. Professionals will recognize you as someone who is serious about his or her career knowing current issues, professional organizations, and hiring trends. You can find much of this information online on employer websites, journals and publications in your industry, and general inquiries on sites like Google or Yahoo.

Talk with professionals in your network to find employers and industries of interest
Once you have connected with professionals through online professional networking sites in your area of interest, begin talking with them about their interests. Look for any similarities. These discussions can open up opportunities where you can find out more information about industries or employers that you cannot though online searches. These contacts will be able to articulate for your specific questions like describing a typical day working for a specific employer or identifying areas of experience needed before gaining a particular position. Although you do not want to use your network only to find employment, these connections could allow you to seek out possible employment opportunities. Use your understanding of the employer or industry to articulate how your skills are beneficial to what they are looking for.

Give back to your network.
After you have gathered information and networked with others keep in mind that giving back to your network helps you to maintain your network. It is considered a poor practice to only gather information, but not serve as a contact to give information. Send your contacts thank you cards after talking with them through the site. Also, now that you know areas of interest from your network, seek out journal articles, websites, programs, or other information that will help them in their development and notify them of your findings.

LinkedIn

The most popular professional networking site is [LinkedIn](#) - a professional networking site focusing on meeting people within different areas of the workforce. This site has become increasing popular among recent college graduates and professionals in various fields. Once you make connections with others whom you know, it becomes even easier to talk with the professionals of the connections you recently made. Meeting more and more of the professionals in your desired area expands your network! Career and Internship Services recommends you utilize LinkedIn to help you professionally as you focus on your career development. Maintaining your online network is only one method of professional communication. Getting involved with professional organizations gives you an opportunity to network in other ways.

5. INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING: What is it and why should I do it?

Informational interviewing is the process of gathering career information from people who are already working in target occupations, organizations, or geographic locations. Both the content of the information and the process of gathering it will help you to refine your goals and possibly discover some new ones.

Informational interviews can happen in person, over the phone, or through e-mail. In-person, these interviews usually last about 20 minutes. There are two main reasons to conduct an informational interview:

1. **To Gain Information**

The main goal of informational interviewing is to obtain information and advice on career fields or job search strategies through one-to-one, comfortable conversations with persons already working in a particular career. Informational interviews are initiated and by you. More specific purposes of informational interviewing include to:
- validate the choice of career by investigating the day-to-day experiences of someone working in the field
- narrow the list of potential employers, developed from reviewing background literature, to those who form the most likely market for your qualifications
- make contacts and obtain current information

- develop a knowledge of the vocabulary of the field;
- gather information that will make a positive impression on employers in a cover letter or a job interview; and to
- build confidence in your ability to discuss your career interests and goals.

2. To Develop Networks

One important benefit of informational interviewing is to build your career network. Networking is the process of discovering and utilizing connections between people. Genuine networks stem from friendships or business relationships. Everyone knows other people, and thus has a network. But "networking" involves movement beyond one's immediate network and tapping into other people's networks, perhaps far removed from one's own. Networks prove very helpful for both exploring career fields and actually finding jobs.

Identifying People for Informational Interviews

Start with lists of people you already know: extended family members, faculty, fellow students, previous or current supervisors, neighbors, etc. You may also want to research (and join) the major professional organizations for your field of interest. The yellow pages from the phone book and staff directories on company websites are also good sources. Lastly, you may also call any organization and ask for the name of the person who holds the job title you would like to have one day. There's no one in the world who you can't try interviewing!

Often the most solid networks stem from a community of people with a shared experience, such as having attended the same college/university. You may benefit from networking with an alum because the alum may be able to give you:
- a better understanding about a particular field of work
- a job or internship lead
- information about a specific job or about a specific employer
- advice on how to apply for a particular position
- suggestions of other people to talk to in the field or organization

Alumni may benefit from talking with you because you can give them:
- an update on what's happening at their alma mater
- a chance to share their opinions about their work and field (something that they may rarely get to do)
- you may be a great candidate for their employer and they may be valued for referring you for employment (some employers even provide monetary rewards to employees who refer candidates that become employees)

Setting up the Informational Interview

Having done your research on organizations and having identified the people with whom you wish to speak, you are now ready to arrange your informational interviews. Contact each person to ask for a time when you can meet to discuss his/her career field and/or organization and, in particular, what he/she person does on the job. ***Be sure to make it clear that you are interested in gathering information and advice—not a job***. Be prepared to explain the kind of information you want..If you feel a bit nervous or anxious about arranging your first few "interviews," here are some ways to overcome your reticence:
- practice what to say before you call, perhaps even jotting down the important points you want to mention;
- begin your interviews with people who are likely to respond to your inquiry—family, friends, previous employers;

- practice the process with a lower priority organization or in an area where you feel you have nothing to lose (e.g., talk to someone working in a hobby area of yours).

If your nervousness is compounded by wondering why any busy professional would be willing to take time to grant you such an interview, keep in mind that people enjoy:
- helping others—information and advice are free to give—jobs aren't
- talking about themselves, their ideas, and their opinions
- a break in routine
- very few people are actually so busy that they don't have a free half-hour during a week.

Example of an Informational Interview Outreach Email:

Subject Line: MassBay Student Seeking Career Advice

Dear Mr. Adams,

I am a student at MassBay Community College studying accounting. We met yesterday at the Business Career Panel and I am writing to follow-up on our conversation.

As we discussed, I am really enjoying my accounting classes at MassBay and am considering a career as an actuary. I am eager to learn more about the field and was hoping that we could a time to speak for 15-20 minutes, at your convenience. I would greatly value your insight and perspective on this career path.

Please let me know if you would be willing to talk with me and if so, a few times/dates that you would be available to speak. I can be reached at eexample@massbay.edu or 508-123-4567. Thank you in advance and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Edith Example

Preparing for the Informational Interview

This is a critical step! Too many students set up interviews, then "drop in" for their appointments without doing any homework. Career contacts are often frustrated when they talk with a student who knows nothing about their field. Also, the more you know about an area or an organization, the more intelligent and productive your questions can be – plus your interviewees will be impressed by this knowledge and preparation on your part. You can research for your informational interview in some of the following ways:
- Search for and read about the company or organization on their website, or if they do not have one, contact someone in the organization and request a prospectus, an annual report or other printed information about the organization;
- Read literature on the specific career field;
- Talk to someone (a friend, neighbor, parent, alumnus, a person who knows this field or organization) – and ask him or her about the career or company.

Before your informational interview, plan open-ended questions that will stimulate discussion and enable both of you to learn about each other. Some sample questions include:
- Can you describe a typical day at your job?
- Can you tell me about your career path? How did you get to your current position?

- What do you like most about your job? What do you find the most challenging?
- What skills do you think are most important to succeed in this career?
- What type of education/training is needed for this career?
- How do you see your field advancing over the next five years?
- What suggestions do you have for new graduates entering this career?
- Is there anyone else that would be helpful for me to speak with for additional information about this field?

Plan ahead what you want to communicate about yourself: skills, traits, and goals. Think about ways to get these attributes across by means of the questions you ask and the way in which you conduct the interview. Focus on the interviewee's views, opinions, thoughts, and feelings rather than cold facts. Your interviewee will enjoy the interview more, and will feel more positive about you as a result.

After the Interview

Send a thank you note/email within 24 hours! A few lines thanking them for their time and help will indicate your appreciation and will keep you in their memory. A note by email is fine and often preferable. **Be specific about information you learned during the interview.** Additionally, you should keep a record of your interviews for your own information. Names, titles, addresses, dates, and major points of discussion will enable you to remember who told you what, and how to get back in touch with your contacts.

Primary Source: http://www.career.virginia.edu/students/cdm/networking.php