

WHAT IS NETWORKING?

Networking is one of the most essential career development and job search tools that is often overlooked by students and job hunters. Networking involves developing **and** maintaining connections with individuals, then mutually benefitting from this developed relationship. In relation to career development, a well developed network provides you with a support system of individuals who can provide meaningful assistance to you as it may relate to your career/industry exploration, connections to other individuals and learning about potential job openings. Networking should be approached as an ongoing process that takes time and nurturing, and **not** something you do just when you are looking for a job. It is important to remember that networking is a two way process in which you provide beneficial support to those in your network as well.

WHY IS NETWORKING IMPORTANT?

Networking provides you with an opportunity to:

- Connect with individuals in your field of interest that can provide beneficial insight
- Gather information pertaining to a particular field or industry
- Increase your chances to find out about job openings otherwise not advertised

CONNECT WITH INDIVIDUALS

One of the best ways to learn about an industry, company or position that you are interested in is to learn about it from someone that is connected to it firsthand. Building your connections will provide you with an invaluable opportunity to best prepare for your career goals. It is important to remember that networking is a **mutually beneficial process**. You never know when your skills and resources can prove to be beneficial to others in your network. Promoting your skills and interest to an individual in your network can additionally lead to opportunities to collaborate with people on projects in which professional interests are shared.

GATHER INFORMATION

Gaining information about a specific career related topic can be most beneficial and inspiring when it comes from the **personal experience** of others. Learning about a specific field of interest and the various occupations within it from an individual in the field provides you with an opportunity to gain this knowledge. Participating in an **informational interview** (see **informational interview section**) will offer an opportunity to gather this information in a structured manner.

LEARN ABOUT JOB VACANCIES

Ever heard of the phrase “It’s not what you know, it’s who you know”? It fully applies here. Approximately **66%** of job vacancies are never advertised to job seekers and are instead obtained through some form of personal and professional references! Employers prefer to hire candidates that have been referred by a trusted source. They are also inclined to hire recently met job seekers who have effectively demonstrated their qualifications and professional competence. By expanding your network to include individuals that have connections to these unknown positions, you greatly increase your chances of learning about opportunities.

HOW DO I ESTABLISH MY NETWORK?

Networking opportunities occur on a daily basis and can include partaking in a brief conversation with someone on an elevator to an arranged meeting with a professional. There are many ways to develop your list of potential networking contacts. Begin by identifying all the people that you come in contact with through your activities. These can include:

- Your friends, their parents, and family members
- Your relatives and extended family
- Former and current employers and co-workers
- Coaches, clergy

- Classmates, faculty, advisors
- Club and organization members
- Professional Associations
- University at Albany Alumni Association members and/or those of other schools you've attended
- UCAN – UAlbany Career Advisory Network

You will have a better chance of talking or meeting with someone when you have been referred by a mutual contact. Begin to develop your networking contacts by asking people if they know someone working in your field of interest. Once you have started to initiate contact, remember to thank and stay in touch with those who assisted. For example, a student that is considering a career in Public Policy might make a list that looks similar to this:

RELATION TO YOU	CAREER INDUSTRY	CONNECTIONS
Sister	Social Services	Has a best friend that works in state government
Professor	Public Administration	Knows several policy professionals from previous experience in lobbying
Family Friend	Accounting	Has a strong professional relationship with her local mayor
Neighbor	Government	Works for the NYS Assembly

HOW TO FURTHER DEVELOP YOUR NETWORK

ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKING

Online social networking has become the fastest growing form of networking amongst professionals. Networking through online resources provides individuals that usually would not have a chance to connect with one another to develop an association on a professional level. Many of these sites serve as a professional networking tool to millions of global users to reconnect with classmates and colleagues, discover new connections through users and obtain answers to industry related questions through both direct contact and discussion boards. It is important to maintain a professional appearance throughout your profile pages when using these social networking sites for career purposes. Some beneficial sites to utilize include:

LinkedIn

- LinkedIn is a business-oriented social networking site mainly used for professional networking. As of August 2014, it had more than 300 million registered users.
- Students create a profile of their professional experience, which can be viewed by others, similar to a resume.
- Groups are an excellent way to network and learn more about career paths. Students should join:
 - Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy, Alumni and Friends

Facebook

- In addition to finding friends and updating profile pages accessible to users, members can also join professional groups and connect with other group members. Many organizations have career oriented pages, such as KPMG Careers and the Presidential Management Fellows Program.
- Join the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy page for updates on events and alumni features.

Twitter

- Twitter is a social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read messages. Many organizations post job opportunities and events through tweets.

Idealist

- A social media site dedicated to non-profit and public interest jobs, internships, volunteer activities, and social justice. By joining the network, you can access other users' profiles and network.

INTERNSHIPS

Working in an internship related to your field of interest will allow you to work directly with professionals. Building and maintaining strong relationships with employees and supervisors you work directly with will allow you to add to your network individuals who can attest to your work ability. Having connections at a company or knowing someone who can pass your resume along is extremely helpful as you begin your job search.

THE UALBANY CAREER ADVISORY NETWORK (UCAN)

The UAlbany Career Advisory Network (UCAN) allows you to search for UAlbany Alumni who are interested in or have experience in specific fields. You can search for an advisor on a number of criteria – industry, company, region and more. Alumni are available to connect with for informational interviews, advice, and networking. The network includes over 1,800 alumni. To find out more, visit www.albany.edu/alumni/ucan.php.

CAREER EVENTS

Participating in various career related events can provide valuable opportunities to meet new professional contacts. As such, students are encouraged to attend as many events as they are able. Some of these events offered through Rockefeller College include:

- Information Sessions
- Alumni Panels & Presentations
- Speed Networking
- Mock Interviews
- Policy Conversations

WHAT IS INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING?

Informational interviewing provides a medium to learn about a specific industry firsthand from individuals that have worked in the field. It is the process of conducting exploratory informational conversations with persons who can provide you with career advice and introduce you to others who can assist you **with your goals**. For some people contacting and speaking to professionals in their field of interest can be intimidating. However, **most people** like to provide information to those breaking into the field, and enjoy talking about their own work. It is important to realize that the purpose of conducting informational interviews is two-fold.

The first purpose of informational interviews is to **gather information** to determine whether or not a potential career or company is a good match for your skills and interests. Talking with experienced professionals is the best way to get a realistic picture of the profession, industry or company. They can describe to you the particular culture of their organization, the type of jobs within it, typical career paths of employees and provide a clear description of their own career. These insiders can also serve as key contacts in your future job search. Considering that most job openings never make it to the classified ads, insiders can help lead you to that elusive "hidden" job market.

Making a lasting impression and **developing long term relationships** is the second goal of informational interviewing. Merely conducting a fifteen minute phone interview will not reap results. Sending thank you notes, maintaining contact, and following up are the keys to maintaining a network with the individuals with

whom you conduct informational interviews. The more you build your network and nurture it, the more effective you will be.

MAKING CONTACT

One of the most efficient ways to initiate an informational interview is through email. **If you have access to a person's email address**, compose a very brief note of introduction, stating how you obtained their name and outlining a few key issues that you would like to address. Ask the contact to reply with an appropriate time for you to speak with him/her. In some cases, you may not receive a response to your email. Unfortunately, people who are flooded with email each day often don't open mail from unknown sources.

If you do not receive a response, follow up with a phone call. Whether you are calling a UCAN Career Advisor or a personal contact, prepare in advance what you want to say. This is your first chance to make a positive impression. You want to sound organized, knowledgeable, and professional. Indicate who you are, how you obtained their name, and why you are calling. Express your interest in talking or meeting with the person at their workplace, indicating that you only need twenty minutes of their time. Practice what you want to say beforehand. You may not get through to the person on the initial try, but remember that persistence and congeniality will go a long way.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Depending upon your initial reasons for meeting with a Career Advisor or personal referral, carefully consider what it is you wish to ask and accomplish in the discussion. Because **you** have initiated the contact, you must be clear about your agenda. Your questions should be focused around three major categories: career preparation, the content and responsibilities of the person's job, and trends in the industry and profession. If possible, do some initial research on the organization with whom the person is affiliated. Set goals and objectives for your discussion and prepare an outline for the meeting.

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

If the interview is being conducted by telephone, call at the agreed upon time. If you are having a face to face meeting, arrive approximately ten minutes early. Be sure to clearly state your purpose for the interview, along with a brief description of who you are, your professional background, and how you were referred to the person. Indicate right away that you are only looking for information and advice. **It is not appropriate to ask a networking contact to provide you with a job.**

Prepare your questions carefully so you come across sincerely and genuinely interested in the person and the information they are sharing. You will be judged upon the scope of your questions and the way you deliver them. As an introduction, discuss a little about your background, skills, and interests. The goal is to be conversational and relaxed yet professional. Your questions should be broad and very open-ended. Remember that you are there to listen and learn, not impress the person with your qualifications for a job. **(See the attached list of questions.)**

Bring a resume and ask the person to review it if it seems appropriate. Many people ask for a resume to get a better understanding of you and your background. If the person has critiqued the resume, you can later send a final copy along with a thank you note.

Be enthusiastic and well prepared; it is the key to a successful interview. Contacts want to feel their time was well spent. In addition, the meeting may benefit them as well. If a position opens up in the future, and you have made a positive impression, you may be in line for a job interview.

End the meeting by asking for other contacts in the field who may be of assistance, and if you could use this person's name as a referral. Be sure to express your gratitude for their time and the information you received.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Evaluate the success of the discussion. Did it meet your goals and objectives? Did you come away with answers to most of your questions? Did it confirm or change your impressions of the occupation or industry? Did it help prepare you for future plans?

Prepare a brief thank you letter (**see attached sample**) outlining some specific points covered during your interview. Enclose a resume, if appropriate. Indicate that you will keep the person informed of your progress and any meeting you set up as a result of their referrals.

Networking is an ongoing process that will continue to demand your time and attention. It means keeping in touch with established contacts, constantly reaching out to new ones, and is essential to your career success.

QUESTIONS FOR NETWORKING AND INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS

Remember, the objective in conducting an informational interview is to gain knowledge about a potential industry and to develop your network. Your questions should be tailored to your personal and career objectives and should not focus directly on obtaining a position with the employer. Here are some possible questions to facilitate your interview.

Career Preparation

What is the best preparation for this profession? (i.e. education, part-time work, training programs, etc.)

What skills or talents are most important for this field and how can they be acquired?

How did you become interested in this profession/organization? What are the good and bad points about this profession?

What was your undergraduate/graduate major? How did it help you prepare for your career? What additional training/education have you had?

How can students find summer jobs or internships in this field? Are there other ways to get experience?

Is a graduate/advanced degree important? If so, which areas of study would you recommend?

What journals, magazines, books, or websites would be helpful for me to learn more about this profession?

What personal attributes do you think have contributed to your success in this field?

What professional organizations do you belong to? Would you recommend I join?

Which of my transferable skills should I emphasize when looking for employment in the field?

What skills are most valued in this profession/industry?

What are some good resources for job opportunities and further research?

Do you have any suggestions regarding my resume?

Job Content and Responsibilities

What services are provided by your organization?

What is a typical day like? Do you work alone or as part of a group?

Can you describe the work environment? (i.e. casual/formal, structured/flexible, etc.)

Which part of the job is most challenging for you?

What do you like most about your position? The least?

What are the greatest pressures, strains, or anxieties in your work? What are the toughest problems or decisions with which you must cope?

What are the time demands related to this field?

How did you find your job?

Can you describe your job history?

Industry/Job Trends and Environment

Tell me about the current state of the industry.

What changes do you foresee in this profession/industry over the next five years?

What is the outlook for jobs and career growth?

In what other settings do people in this profession work? (e.g. educational institutions, corporations, non-profits, etc.)

What are the titles/responsibilities of the people you work for/with?

To whom do you report?

What are the typical entry level positions in this field?

What is the typical career path?

What are the beginning, mid-range, and top salaries in this profession?

Where are the best employment prospects? What are employment prospects in your company?

Do you know anyone else who could share career advice with me?

SAMPLE EMAIL REQUEST FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Dear Ms. Smith,

I was referred to you through Professor Bob McEvoy from Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy at the University at Albany. I am writing to introduce myself and request a possible meeting or phone call with you regarding my interest in the field of local government.

Presently, I am in my first year of the MPA program at Rockefeller College, with a concentration in local government management. In the past, I participated in various internships and volunteer experiences surrounding politics, doing campaign work for Senator Schumer. Having completed one semester in the MPA program, I am now considering what my options are in pursuing full-time positions after graduation. If possible, I would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you for an informational interview so that I can learn more about your career path, find out about opportunities in the field, and get some advice from you as to how I can best achieve my goals.

I know you are very busy and truly appreciate whatever time you can give me. I look forward to hearing from you and hope that we can set up a meeting. Thank you in advance for considering this request.

Sincerely,
John Doe

SAMPLE THANK YOU EMAIL FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEW

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Thank you for spending time with me last Tuesday to discuss your career and the field of public finance. I was extremely appreciative of the tour of your facility as well as the introduction to your colleagues.

The information you provided about your position as a Financial Analyst at the NYS Division of Budget was extremely helpful. Your description of your duties helped to clarify the distinction between public and private finance. I also appreciated your tips on entering into public finance, and will plan to follow up immediately with the contact names you shared with me.

Again, thank you for your assistance. I thoroughly enjoyed our visit, and will keep you posted on my progress.

Sincerely,
Max Evans

SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER TO NETWORKING REFERRAL SOURCE

Dear Ms. Mertz:

It was a pleasure meeting you at the "Policy Conversation" sponsored by Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy last month. I appreciated your interest in my job search and would like to particularly thank you for putting me in contact with Jane Bryant at the American Red Cross in Boston.

Ms. Bryant was most generous with her time and provided me with a great deal of useful information on job hunting in the Boston area. She made valuable suggestions for strengthening my resume and gave me the names of a few colleagues who might be interested in my background and skills.

Enclosed is a copy of my updated resume. Feel free to make comments or suggestions. Again, thank you for being so helpful. I will keep in touch as my search progresses.

Sincerely,
Lucille Ricardo