Building Your Network

Networking isn’t about talking to someone with the aim of passing on your resume or handing out a business card. It’s about building and maintaining professional relationships. Successful networking will build a strong base of contacts who can be a resource when you are looking for a new career opportunity. These individuals can share job-hunting advice or tips, inside information about job openings and hiring processes, or provide recommendations.

Make connections with the people around you during your academic journey including professors and peers. Volunteer, get involved in student groups, attend career events, and join professional organizations to expand your network while you are still in school.

Informational Interviewing

One way to begin building your network is by conducting informational interviews. Informational interviews are brief meetings with people who are established in a particular career field, and the interviews are an opportunity for you to ask their perspective on their job, the company, the future of the field, and how they grew to where they are today. This interview can be conducted either in person or by phone. In either case, ask the individual you are contacting if you may visit with them for a specific period of time for an informational interview.

Note that you are not asking for a job interview, nor are you asking for a job in the future. The object is to obtain information that may be useful for you in making decisions involved in your career planning and in the job search process. People are usually very open to speaking with students who are approaching the job market and are eager to pass on advice. Don’t be shy about reaching out, but keep in mind a few general rules.

General Etiquette

• Know your audience (recruiters, alumni). This will help determine how to tailor your approach.
• Know the appropriate method of communication (email, phone, or online networking).
• Always answer these key questions: Who are you, and what is the purpose of this communication?

Email/Online Messaging Format

• Subject line: Use a subject line that makes a connection. If you don’t include a subject line and the individual does not recognize your name, it is likely that your message will be deleted before it is read.
• Intro: State your name, year, major, and how you received their information.
• Body: This should be the goal of your email.
  • “I’m interested in learning more about _____ industry/company.”
  • “I’m looking for opportunities to network with as many experts in the industry as possible.”
  • “______ recommended I contact you and speak with you briefly to learn more about ______.”
• Set up the phone call/meeting: “I’d love the opportunity to speak with you for 15-20 minutes and learn more about ______. Is there a good time within the next few weeks that I can schedule a call or meeting with you?”
• Closing: Thank them for their time!

After successfully setting up a meeting, have an agenda with specific questions you want to ask. For example:
• How did you get started at this company or in this field?
• What kinds of schooling and/or experiences are necessary to be successful?
• What do you find most rewarding about this work?
• What advice do you have for making the most of my time at IU?
• Is there anyone else that you recommend I should meet with to gain more perspective?
**Phone Call/Meeting Format**

- **Intro:** State your name, year, major, and how you received their information.
  - “Is this a good time to talk?”

- **Body:** This should be the goal of your call.
  - “What advice would you have for someone in my position?”
  - “Why do you like working in the ______ industry/company?”
  - “I’ve had exposure to ______ through my ______ course OR internship at ______. Do you have any advice regarding other related areas I should learn about?”

- **Closing:** Ask for referrals or about openings with their company. Send them your resume.
  - “Is it okay if keep in touch every few months with you?” (This depends on your level of rapport.)

**Things to remember:**

- They are doing you a favor, so work around what is convenient for their schedule and remember to remain respectful of their time.
- The informational interview is about getting information about a career and industry, not about getting a job, so do your research on the industry before the interview and set an agenda.
- You are building a professional relationship, so be polite and courteous.
- Send a thank you email 24-48 hours after the informational interview.

**Elevator Pitch**

An “elevator pitch” is your quick introduction and personal selling statement used when meeting employers or attending networking events. It should be a concise speech that describes who you are, what skills you have, and why you are interested in a position. When delivered verbally, you should be able to give your pitch in 30 seconds or less. A good elevator pitch takes practice and planning but should also feel natural and be adapted to situations and audiences.

At a recruiting event, such as an information session or the Career Fair, an elevator pitch should include:

- An introduction, including your name and degree
- The focus of your search
- Relevant skills and experiences that you have to offer
- What differentiates you from your peers
- A call for response

Some sample elevator pitches are below:

*Hi, my name is Serena Dominguez, and I am a junior Informatics major. In the past year, I’ve strengthened my skills in applying technology solutions through my work in Serve IT with a local nonprofit. I am looking for an internship position that will allow me to work in a client-facing role but also require some technical analytics. The position I saw posted in SoIC Careers by your company piqued my interest, and I’d like to know more about what type of experience you require the best way to apply.*

*Hello, I’m Matthew Parker, and I am a first-year student in the computer science master’s degree program. Prior to graduate school, I worked for four years as software development consultant for a large public consulting firm. I was able to combine my love for problem solving with business, and this passion led me to further pursue my education. Can you tell me what skills you look for in a candidate that can really set them apart?*
Social Media

Social media usage in career-related and recruiting activities has increased significantly in recent years. At their best, social media sites can keep you informed of trends and news, serve as a place to look for jobs and internships, and allow you to expand your personal and professional network. Although technology and the popularity of social media will continue to change and evolve rapidly, consider the following sites as part of your job search:

LinkedIn.com
This professional networking site can be a useful resource for you to establish a professional online identity, learn more about particular companies, participate in industry-related conversations, and make connections with other professionals in your career path.

Twitter.com
This microblogging site can also be a great way for you to interact with people of similar professional interests from across the globe. Additionally, companies are increasingly using Twitter to promote jobs and internships, and you can follow companies of interest to find additional opportunities.

Facebook.com
Be sure your activities on Facebook won’t give prospective employers “red flags” about you as a candidate. Check your photos, videos, and comments for professionalism, and utilize Facebook’s privacy settings to limit public viewing of tagged photos, wall posts, and other aspects of your profile (or make your profile entirely unsearchable).

About.me
The about.me platform helps students make a beautiful homepage that inspires recruiters to connect with you. This platform has become a favorite amongst college students as it allows individuals to display their personality and skills, both professionally and creatively. Recruiters can discover and connect with students without having to navigate through the other social profiles they may have.

There are a variety of other tools and sites that you can use to develop your personal brand and incorporate into your job search strategy, including blogging (Wordpress.com, Blogger.com) and participating in sharing networks (Slideshare.com). But, like most career-related activities, you should initiate these as part of a larger strategy that emphasizes your personal skills and values.
Using LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a professional networking resource that is increasingly being used by employers and recruiters to find potential candidates. It also is a space for candidates to find employers and build a professional network. LinkedIn is NOT Facebook. The connections you make on LinkedIn should be people who can potentially make introductions for you, or for whom you could make introductions. Be selective about who you add to your professional network.

Complete Your Profile

When building your LinkedIn profile, be sure to make it as complete as possible. Complete profiles garner more views and therefore more opportunities!

• **Headline and Photo:** Your headline should be a concise but descriptive branding statement that shows your current position and goals. The default headline is your current title, but you can customize it to reflect your brand and your aspirations. Unlike Facebook, you only get one photo on LinkedIn. Make sure the photo is a high quality image of just you, professionally dressed.

• **Summary:** It is important to craft your professional summary by including information about your work passions, skills, qualifications, goals, and interests. This is where you can include relevant work experience as well as non-academic involvement. Write your summary in a first-person narrative, and tell your story in a way that gives employers a quick glimpse of who you are and what you care about in your career.

• **Experience:** Add your work history, providing a thorough description of your work responsibilities, tasks performed, and key accomplishments and contributions. Your experience does not need to be paid or full-time—you can include internships, part-time jobs, volunteer work, or extracurriculars. Include strategic key words and phrases that will stand out to recruiters.

• **Skills and Endorsements:** The skills section allows you to highlight the skills you have on your resume and any additional skills you feel you can bring to the table. Your network—those colleagues and friends who are familiar with your work—can "endorse" those skills, vouching for your professional abilities.

• **Projects:** This section give you the opportunity to highlight projects that you are particularly proud of and would like to bring to the attention of an employer. Put the project in context (class project, professional project, voluntary, etc.) and discuss your specific contributions. If you worked in a team, add the team members to the project listing.

Make Connections

When building your network, make connections with people you have met and interacted with—professors, supervisors, coworkers, peers, and others. Be sure to personalize the note when inviting someone to connect with you by reminding them where they met you or why you would like to connect.

Join Groups

You can join groups or associations based on your interests, connections, education, or industry, and these groups give you an opportunity to interact directly with professionals through ongoing group discussions. You will want to join and display membership in different groups on LinkedIn that are relevant to your job search and reflect your network. These groups show up at the bottom of your profile, which shows employers and your other connections that you are interested in engaging in the professional community.