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.

Networking provides you with an opportunity to:

1. Connect with individuals in your field of interest that can provide beneficial insight
   - 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.

2. Gather information pertaining to a particular field or industry
   - 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.

3. Increase your chances to find out about job openings otherwise not advertised
   - 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. These can include:

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<th>Connections You Already Know</th>
<th>Discover New Connections</th>
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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. Networking through online resources, professional associations, and career fairs provides individuals that usually would not have a chance to connect with one another to develop an association on a professional level.
WHAT IS INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS?

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 information 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 you conduct informational interviews with. 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 information interview is through e-mail. If you have access to a person’s e-mail 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. In some cases, you may not receive a response to your e-mail. Unfortunately, people who are flooded with e-mail each day often don’t open mail from unknown sources. Ask the contact to reply within an appropriate time for you to speak with him. In some cases, you may not receive a response to your e-mail. Unfortunately, people who are flooded with e-mail each day often don’t open mail from unknown sources. If you don’t get a reply within a few days, or you don’t have access to an e-mail address, you will need to try the more traditional route, sending a letter of introduction by snail mail, the US Postal Service (see attached sample). In either case you should follow up with a phone call. Whether you are calling a Pace 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. 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 here 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.
Being enthusiastic and well prepared 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 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. If you have spoken with a Pace Alumni Career Advisor, complete and return the Participant Feedback Form to the Co-op and Career Services office.

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 INFORMATION**

Remember, the objective is to gain knowledge about a potential industry or company, and to develop your network. Your questions should be tailored to your personal 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.)
- How did you become interested in this profession/organization?
- What was your undergraduate major? How did it help you prepare for your career?
- How can students find summer jobs or internships in this field? Are there other ways to get experience?
- Is a graduate 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 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 time demands related to this field?

**Industry/Job Trends and Environment**

- 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?
- 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?