

# **GUIDE TO NETWORKING**

**Becker Career Center**

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Contact us: 518-388-6176  
[www.union.edu/career](http://www.union.edu/career)

# Networking

The goal of networking, from a job search perspective, is to acquire knowledge about career fields of interest and build genuine relationships with professionals and experts to increase the likelihood of securing an opportunity for which you are well suited.

## Examples of Networking

- Julie meets her sorority sister's father during Family Weekend and learns about his position at a well known advertising firm in New York City. As a result of talking with him and following up to thank him for his time, Julie is given a contact to follow up with about their summer internship program.
- Recently at a college career fair, Emily meets with a Human Resources representative from a national company regarding internship opportunities in California. Although the representative was hiring for the Northeast region, Emily e-mailed the recruiter after the career fair and was able to obtain a company contact on the west coast.
- David spent winter break learning about the Arts Administration career path by conducting informational interviews with Union alumni and contacts found through his faculty. David's informational interviews allowed him to hear of un-posted job opportunities, which led to interviews, and ultimately a job offer.
- Neil talks with his Electrical Engineering professor about his interests in renewable energy. Neil's professor encourages him to speak with an employer from the renewable energy sector that recently presented at a conference he attended.
- During her travels through Reamer Campus Center, Lisa stopped and spoke with a Peace Corps representative who had set up an information table. Lisa learned about the mission of the Peace Corps, the candidate recruitment process, and was provided with contact information of a past volunteer who could provide further insights.

As the examples above illustrate, networking can be conducted in a spontaneous or planned manner. Always be ready to introduce yourself and network.

## Identifying and Establishing Your Network

- Start by identifying people you already know. Even if they are not in the fields of interest to you, they can often lead you to people who are. This includes family, sorority/fraternity members, friends, community members, professors, coaches, former employers, etc.
- Join clubs and professional organizations that relate to your areas of interest. These can lead to valuable connections to professionals within career fields of interest.
- Identify Union College alumni who are employed in career fields of interest through faculty, administrators, and the Union Career Advisory Network (UCAN).
- Utilize social networks (e.g. Facebook and LinkedIn) to identify additional contacts and get updated information on alumni.

## Strategies for Effective Networking

- When possible, make your initial contact by e-mail. This gives your contact the opportunity to respond when they are able to.
- Prepare and practice your self introduction so you are prepared when a networking opportunity presents itself.
- Ask contacts for their career advice **not** for a job or internship.
- Network with entry and mid-level professionals first. After acquiring sufficient knowledge, begin contacting more senior level professionals.
- Always follow up networking meetings with a thank you e-mail or note reiterating what you learned, and thanking your contacts for their assistance.
- Dress professionally for in-person meetings and employer visits.
- Organize a tracking system to record names, addresses, meetings, and follow-up.
- Avoid all take and no give (e.g., when talking to Union alums, update them about Union).

# Conducting Your Informational Interview

Informational interviews are networking meetings where you ask professionals within career fields of interest questions regarding their work, industry, career path, educational background, and job search advice. Informational interviews can be conducted in-person or over the phone, and are a great tool for building your network and acquiring insider knowledge.

## Step 1: Arranging and Preparing for an Informational Interview

- Initiate contact by sending a networking e-mail stating your interest in speaking with your contacts for 15 - 20 minutes about their career experiences.
- Arrange a mutually convenient time to meet or speak with your contacts. Let them know you appreciate their time and are willing to work around their schedule.
- Research your contact's career field and employer. The Becker Career Center has tools that can help including Facts on File, Vault, Going Global, Spotlight on Careers, ReferenceUSA, and Glassdoor.
- Develop several questions to ask your contacts.
- After a few informational interviews you should be able to replace your standard questions with more insightful ones.

## Step 2: Conducting the Informational Interview

- Call your contacts from a quiet place where you know you won't be interrupted.
- If meeting in person, plan to dress professionally and arrive 10 minutes early at the prearranged location.
- Reintroduce yourself and explain why you're reaching out to them.
- Begin by asking the questions you prepared. However, be flexible if the conversation takes a different path.
- Keep track of time, let your contact know when 15 - 20 minutes is up, offer to end the conversation, and follow the contact's lead on ending or continuing the conversation.
- Be sincere, show interest, and thank your contacts for volunteering their time.
- Ask contacts if they would provide you with other professionals that can offer additional career information.
- If the connection is genuine, ask if you can stay in touch.

**Important: Not every informational interview will go as planned. Some may be frustrating. It is at this point when most people stop. Don't! Persevere and acquire the knowledge that will allow you to compete more effectively.**

## Step 3: Follow up

- Send your contact a thank you e-mail or letter immediately following your conversation.
- Track each networking conversation and note: the date, key information/insights, and next steps established to help facilitate future conversations with this contact.
- If your contact agrees to allow you to keep in touch, mention in your letter that you'll be doing so. Multiple communications (e.g., following up every 4 - 8 weeks) increase the likelihood that your contact will think of you if/when an opportunity arises.
- If the individuals you spoke with provided additional contacts, keep them updated as to whom you've followed up with.

## Self Introduction

Alumni events, guest lectures, career fairs, conferences, athletic events, college reunions, and neighborhood gatherings are all great venues to engage in networking. Prepare and practice a concise introduction so that you're always ready to network effectively. Include your full name, class year, major, and career field of interest, and ask your contact if they would mind if you asked them a couple of questions about their career field. For example:

Hi, I'm Robert Plant (handshake). It's nice to meet you. I am a first year student at Union majoring in psychology. I'm interested in learning more about the publishing field and heard that you work at XYZ Publishing. Would you mind if I asked you a couple of questions about your experiences working in publishing?

**Remember: The purpose of networking is to acquire knowledge about career fields of interest and build genuine relationships. It is not appropriate to ask for jobs or internships.**

## Requesting an Informational Interview via E-Mail

Subject: Union College Student Seeking Alumni Advice

Dear Ms. Jacobsen,

I'm an English major in my junior year at Union College, and have interest in pursuing a career in the field of television and film production. I found your contact and employer information through the Union Career Advisory Network. I was excited to see that you are currently employed by MTV as a producer. I would very much like to learn more about your experiences in the industry and any advice you'd be willing to share with regards to succeeding in the field.

Would you be willing to speak with me for 15 - 20 minutes about your experiences in media production at a time that's convenient for you? I've attached my resume just to give you a better sense of who I am. (Note: UCAN does not allow you to attach your resume, so do not include this sentence when corresponding with alumni through UCAN).

Thank you for your consideration, I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Beverly Hillbilly

## Follow up/Thank You E-Mail

Subject: Thank You for Your Time and Advice

Dear Ms. Jacobsen,

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me earlier today regarding your experiences at MTV. Your insights into preparing for a career in media production were extremely helpful.

Thank you again.

Sincerely,

Beverly Hillbilly

# Networking at a Career Fair

Career Fairs provide a great opportunity to network with multiple recruiters in a convenient location. The organizations participating may offer full-time positions, internship, and/or volunteer experiences. In addition, employers are eager to speak with students who are exploring career fields of interest. Below are some tips for making the most of these events.

## **Before the Event**

*Research organizations attending the event:*

- Research the organization's mission, customers, competitors, products, and services. Utilize Career Center resources, the organization's website, HireU and/or industry journals and magazines when conducting your research.
- Be sure to consider small or lesser known organizations as they can provide exceptional opportunities to learn about a profession and how business works.
- Use the Union Career Advisory Network (UCAN) to identify alumni who work at the organizations of interest and contact them to conduct informational interviews.

*Prepare and finalize your resume:*

- ***Have your resume critiqued by a Career Center Staff Member before*** attending a Career Fair. Employers can tell who has had their resume reviewed by a member of the Career Center and who has not.
- Print 15 copies of your resume on resume paper. Bring resumes in a portfolio with a note pad and pen.

*Prepare and practice your introduction:*

- Prepare a short introduction that includes your name, class year, major and whether you are interested in full-time or internship positions. For example, "Hi, my name is Sara Goodwin. I am a junior at Union College, majoring in Biology. Through my research, I understand that your company hires Research Interns and I would like to learn more about these opportunities."
- If you are exploring career fields of interest, your introduction should include similar information. For example, "Hi, my name is Chad Wilson. From my research I understand that your organization employs teachers throughout the world. I am interested in learning about the characteristics of a successful teacher and more about the teaching profession."
- Practice your introduction to increase confidence and comfort with introducing yourself.
- Prepare questions to ask the representatives (refer to the back of the guide for sample questions).

*Anticipate questions from employers:*

- Employers will ask why you are interested in their organization and the opportunity.
- Be prepared to answer questions about your experiences and relevant skills and to provide a copy of your resume upon request.

*Dress professionally:*

- Career Fair attire for men and women is a conservative black, navy or dark gray two-piece business suit.

## **During the Event**

*This is the time to be professional (this is work not a social event):*

- Arrive 20-30 minutes prior to the start of the event. Review the employer directory to identify employers of interest to you. Be prepared to wait your turn to speak with the representative.
- Greet each employer with a firm handshake, make eye contact and smile.
- Listen carefully to what the representative has to say so that you can respond clearly and succinctly to employer questions. Resist the temptation to talk too much.
- Remember the names of the representatives with whom you are speaking; try to say his/her name early in the conversation – this will help you remember. Always ask for a business card or write down the representative's names.

## **After the Event**

- Send a thank you e-mail or note, which should include a reference to your conversation. For example, "I appreciated speaking with you about opportunities at Hexagon Graphics. I have submitted my application for the graphic design summer internship and look forward to discussing my qualifications with you in the near future." Keep the note succinct and to the point.

\*\*\*For helpful information on resumes, professional dress, interviewing, and more refer to our career guides at <http://www.union.edu/offices/career/students/handouts/index.php>.\*\*\*

## Questions to ask While Networking

- What are the primary responsibilities of your job?
- What do you like most/least about your job? About your field?
- What parts of your position do you find most challenging?
- How would you describe your work environment?
- How did you get your current position?
- How do most people enter this profession?
- How did you get started in the industry? What has been your career path?
- What educational preparation would you recommend for someone who wants to advance in this field?
- What are the key challenges for the department/company?
- What are the characteristics of the people who succeed in this position?
- What developments on the horizon could affect future opportunities in this field/company?
- What professional journals and organizations should I be aware of?
- Can you recommend sources for more information (specific books, trade publications, professional journals, websites, etc.)?
- What advice do you have for students who are preparing to enter your field?
- Are there other people with whom you recommend I speak? When I contact them, may I use your name?
- How/why did you decide to pursue the career in which you are working?
- What was your undergraduate major? How did it help prepare you for your career? What additional training/education have you had?
- Can you recommend any courses I should take before furthering my job search?
- How can students find summer jobs or internships in your field? What other means of gaining experience before graduation would you recommend?
- Is a graduate degree important? If so, what fields of study are helpful?
- What courses/prerequisites should I take to better prepare myself for graduate school?
- Where can someone in an entry-level position expect to be in two years? Five years? Ten years?
- Who does your company view as competitors?
- Relative to your competitors, what is your competitive advantage?
- What are the key metrics that you use to evaluate your department/business?
- What is the employment outlook in your field? Can you describe any developments that are on the horizon?
- What are the trends affecting the industry?
- What is unique about your graduate school and program?
- What is the success rate of graduates from your program finding employment upon graduation?
- What types of assistantships are available at your institution?

# Networking Meeting Record

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Referred by: \_\_\_\_\_

Key Information/Insights: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Referrals (Name, Title & Contact Info): \_\_\_\_\_

Next Steps: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Referred by: \_\_\_\_\_

Key Information/Insights: \_\_\_\_\_

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